



CAPTAIN PETE IN ALASKA

JAMES COOPER WHEELER



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"IT'S A SMALL SCHOONER," HE ANNOUNCED TO KENNEDY
AND JOE *Frontispiece*

CAPTAIN PETE IN ALASKA

BY

JAMES COOPER WHEELER

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PETE OF CORTESANA," "THERE SHE BLOWS," ETC.



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Captain Pete in Alaska

CHAPTER I

BLONDIN TELLS CAPTAIN KENNEDY WHAT HE FOUND IN ALASKA

TWO men stood in front of Dr. Sloggett's drug store in Friday Harbor talking earnestly. The elder was a noble-looking fellow in the prime of life. His keen eye, long, heavy chin, and bronzed face marked him as a man of action. The second, some twenty years his junior, had a certain distinction of mien that attracted attention. He was above the ordinary stature, but so perfectly formed one did not realize the fact, while his features were framed in an aquiline mould that, assisted by a sallow and almost swarthy complexion, betrayed to the student of ethnology traces of Indian ancestry. His bearing was that of a successful man of affairs.

The first was our old acquaintance Captain Kennedy of the customs department of Puget Sound, and the listener was Peter Gaignic, better known in San Juan County as "Captain Pete."

It was more than a year since the foiling of the famous opium conspiracy at Port Townsend in which these two men had brought about the death of Joe Cloon, and aided Collector Hogan in the largest capture of smuggled opium ever made in the Northwest.

"Yes, Pete," said Kennedy, "I have resigned from the service. I do not care for the new head of the department, and anyhow there's no more fun in the business like there was in the old days when we had Kelly and Mike McGovern and fellows of that stripe to keep us stirred up. When you dropped those two bullets into Joe Cloon that night on the Port Townsend wharf you knocked the tar out of smuggling on the Sound, and there hasn't been anybody with nerve enough to go up against the game since."

"What are you driving at now?" asked Pete. "A man like you cannot live contentedly among us quiet citizens. If you could, I'd ask you to come over and run the shingle mill I have just bought in Cortesana. Why don't you take a half interest with me, Cap? There's money in it, and it would give you occupation."

"Don't talk to me about shingle mills, Pete! If you left me in charge I'd break you in a month altho' I hear that you've made money hand over fist since you went into that Cortesana deal. No, I'm not cut out for that sort of thing, and I know enough to keep out of it. But I've got a bee buz-

zing in my head, and that's the reason I ran over to have a talk with you. Now listen. A month ago I met a man in Victoria named Blondin. He was a crazy fool of a Frenchman who had just come down from Alaska. He told me he had been up there eight or nine years with one of the big trading companies at Dutch Harbor. He was a simple duck, and after I had known him a couple of weeks he began to throw out hints of a great discovery he had made in Alaska. I didn't pay much attention, and it finally made him mad because he couldn't get me interested. One night when he had more than his usual allowance of cognac, he teased me to go with him to his shack on the Arm. He said he would tell me something of great importance. I laughed at him, and then he got hot, and shoved his hand in his belt, and pulled out a buckskin sack. He loosened the string at the mouth, and told me to hold out my hands. I did, and I'll be horn-swoggled if he did not fill them with little nuggets of virgin gold: 'Now will you come with me!' he snarled, 'and I'll tell you where I got that, and where there are millions more for the picking up!' You might have knocked me down with a broom straw! There must have been a thousand dollars worth of gold in the bag, and here I'd been taking him for a simple, common-place old stiff. To cut it short I went to his shack, and he told me the yarn. He had been up the Yukon trapping for the company, and had made camp about four hundred miles

from the head waters, on a small creek. He'd had a notion there was gold in the country, and was on the look out. This time he struck it, sure enough. He dug some likely dirt, and panned it out. When the water dissolved the dirt and ran it off, there were a dozen nuggets worth a dollar or so a piece at the bottom of the pan. He stayed there two weeks, and came out with forty pounds of gold—about eight thousand dollars worth—which was all he wanted to tote. He *cached* the most of it, and only brought out what he had shown me. You see he had money coming from the company, and was afraid as death some one would get on to his secret. I was the first man who inspired him with confidence enough to make him open up. Does this interest you as much as shingle mills?"

The question was unnecessary, and even ironical, for Kennedy had noted the flushed cheek and gleaming eyes that betokened how his young friend was taken up with the tale. However, his voice was cool enough as he answered:

"You have an interesting way of telling a yarn, Cap, but after all, I cannot see anything that looks very practical. You must acknowledge that the story is mighty improbable."

Kennedy seemed a little disgusted at his lack of success in enthusing Captain Pete, and took up his tale again:

"Well, that's not the whole of it. I had not got fifty feet from his shack that night when I met a

Victoria policeman I was acquainted with, and I stopped to pass the time of night with him. It was lucky for me I did, for the next morning Blondin was found stabbed to death, lying on his pallet in the cabin. Cox, the cop, remembered meeting me coming out, and it seems we were the last people who saw him alive, for he had stood at the door while I talked with Cox."

"By Ginger!" exclaimed Pete, betraying himself. "It's a pity he didn't tell you the exact location of that stream on the Yukon so we could find it again."

"Pete," said Kennedy earnestly, "he did locate it—that night! and I am the sole owner of the secret. Do you want to go halves in it?"

For answer Captain Pete held out his hand, and the revenue man took it in his own mighty grasp. Then for the first time, he let it be seen how thoroughly in earnest he was himself:

"By the Tear of the Holy Crocodile, Pete," he exclaimed. "I believe in this thing as I do in my own six shooter. The story is true as gospel, and there's a pile of glittering gold up there awaiting us if we have got the nerve to go and dig it out!"

"I want to understand it better before we get down to business," said Pete. "We must talk this over at greater length, and undisturbed, Cap. Why not go back with me to Cortesana? I have got a sloop here that I borrowed to come over in, and we can go in her, and do our talking on the way without any danger of being interrupted."

"Just the thing," agreed Kennedy, "and there's a fair wind."

Half an hour later the two were sitting in the stern sheets of the little craft as they drew past Brown's island with a flowing sheet.

"Now," began Captain Pete, throwing off his indifference. "Cap, I want to know how you are going to find that place where Blondin washed out the gold. Can you spot it with any certainty?"

"It ain't going to be so gol-darned easy," returned the revenue man, scratching his head perplexedly. "You see, the Frenchman was going to give me a sort of a map that he had made, but he was pretty boozy, and I did not push him. At the last I came away without it. When he was found the next morning his clothes had been rifled, and it was evident the murderer had ransacked the whole shack. Whoever it was must have taken the map. I do not suppose it was definite enough for any outsider to get on to what we know—"

"You can't tell!" interrupted Pete. "Somebody is always liable to find out what you don't want them to. I wish you had the paper."

"It's impossible any one could interpret it without hearing the story—as I did."

"Well, go ahead," said the young fellow impatiently. "How can you spot the place supposing you get up there on the Yukon?"

"Listen," rejoined the other. "The Frenchman told me that last night—every word is burned in

my memory—first, that the creek which had no name he was aware of, entered the Yukon about four hundred miles from the head waters. It is on the left bank of the river, going east. Now comes what makes me certain of finding the place. Blondin said that as he turned into the little bay which the Yukon forms at the point where the creek comes in, he could see right in front of him, and apparently about fifty miles distant, a mighty, snow-covered peak. He thought it fifteen or twenty thousand feet high, and it reminded him of Mt. Rainier in shape, though the top was split into two distinct pinnacles.” Captain Pete drew a deep breath of satisfaction as Kennedy continued: “At the foot of the bay where the stream came in there was a bar extending out some three hundred yards which by some freak of the current, had been formed into the exact shape of a spoon with the bowl towards the deep water, and the long, slender handle leading to the shore. Now,” he demanded with sudden heat, “what do you think of that? Can we find it?”

Pete nodded thoughtfully: “It looks good,” he acknowledged. “It doesn’t seem probable that any other creek in that vicinity would be apt to have the mountain and that same peculiar sand spit. I guess it could be found although it might take a long search, at that. But it is worth hunting up.”

Pete leaned back deep in thought. Kennedy did not interrupt his meditations, and our hero pro-

ceeded according to his habit to think the matter out.

While our young hero is puzzling out his problem is a good time to bring the reader abreast of the story. Those who have been acquainted with Captain Pete Graignic since he started in life as a little, half breed fisher boy from Waldron Island, on Puget Sound, know already how he gallantly fought his way upward from the humblest origin to a place in the world where he was a figure of importance in the community with which he had cast his lot. The purchase of thirty acres in the outskirts of the growing city of Cortesana, through the counsel of his friend, Major Fisher, and some fortunate transactions in which he was of service to the revenue department of Puget Sound, had given him his start. His daring and acquaintance with the smuggler-haunted San Juan archipelago had made him the chief figure in the foiling of a gigantic conspiracy against the government, and he was rewarded with a considerable sum of money. He took advantage of this windfall, and studied under a tutor in Port Townsend so earnestly that he made up for the lack of early education.

His story has been told in "Captain Pete of Cortesana" up to the point where he had succeeded in saving his friend the Collector of the Internal Revenue Department from the toils that had been wound about him through the machinations of Joe Cloon, the leader of the great conspiracy.

In the final struggle Captain Pete had killed Cloon who was bringing into the United States an enormous shipment of opium, and enabled Collector Hogan to capture the remainder of the smugglers who had been defying the customs authorities. Pete had a still stronger motive for his activity in Mr. Hogan's behalf, in the fact that he was in love with the Collector's youngest daughter, a charming girl named Grace. She was inclined to reciprocate his affection. Having succeeded in re-establishing Grace's father in the prestige he had nearly lost, and feeling that his prospects were such that he would be able to maintain the loved one in the station to which she was born, he put the matter before the father of the lady, and asked her hand in marriage.

Collector Hogan was bound to Captain Pete by strong ties of gratitude, and loved the lad as if he were his own son. He had, however, never contemplated him in the light of a *son-in-law*, and the idea took him aback on account of Pete's mixed parentage. But after considering the matter he swallowed the fact that our hero's mother was an Indian woman—albeit the daughter of a chief—and gave his consent to the match, although he stipulated Grace should be bound by no engagement, and that three years should elapse before there was any question of marriage. At the end of the period if they were still of the same mind, he would interpose no objections.

Grace accepted this verdict with equanimity, while Pete chafed consumedly. However, he had to grin and bear his burdens, and characteristically he applied himself to business with an ardor which, if it did not allay his impatience, bade fair to make him a prominent and wealthy man by the time he was permitted to claim his bride. His friend Mr. Hagan, a leading citizen in Cortesana, assisted him in gaining a business foothold in the new city, and at the time we meet him again the half breed fisher boy is forging into the front rank of the community.

Pete was eighteen when this story opens although he had matured mentally and physically into a splendid man. And by the way, Dope, the great mastiff who took so important a part in the events of "Captain Pete of Cortesana," had entirely recovered from the terrible blow Cloon gave him in the freight shed. He was in Cortesana awaiting the return of his master, and was more highly trained, more intelligent, and, as formidable—to his master's enemies—as ever.

To conclude our recapitulation, Tom Fisher, Pete's side partner had gone to Stanford University, where he was making a very good record in his freshman year, and getting all the fun the law allowed as he went along. The Major and Mrs. Fisher were on a visit to the old home in the East.

CHAPTER II

CAPTAIN PETE IS UNANIMOUSLY ELECTED PRESIDENT AND TREASURER OF THE YELLOWBIRD GOLD MINING COMPANY

CAPTAIN PETE'S mind took up the whole matter of the Alaskan enterprise, and examined it section by section. He was too well aware of Kennedy's straightforwardness and sagacity to give the incident of his meeting with the Frenchman Blondin much attention. The ex-revenue officer was the last man to be deceived by the cock-and-bull story of an irresponsible person.

"No," he thought, "there cannot be much doubt about the gold discovery. If Blondin had lied, or even talked loosely, the Captain would have smelt a rat. I never knew his judgment to be much out of the way in a matter of importance. If we assume the story to be true, there only remains the difficulty of finding the mouth of that creek sixteen hundred miles up the great river. But the Frenchman gave a vivid description, and Kennedy has probably got it word for word, for his memory is tenacious as writing on stone. I am mightily inclined to take hold of the thing for the fun and adventure of it. The trip up the Yukon would be

great, and if there is money at the end it would help me make things a little more comfortable for Grace. The dear girl! Two years more to wait! I shall run up to Port Townsend and ask her if she is willing I should take the trip. The boom business in real estate is over in Cortesana, and it would not hurt anything if I were to remain away a year. Hagan would attend to things for me, though I am afraid the old man will not approve of this adventure. He believes in 'legitimate business,' as he calls it, and he certainly has done well in that line himself. But 'legitimate business' is slow work while I am waiting for Grace, and the time would pass more rapidly up on the Yukon gold hunting." He straightened up, and met Kennedy's eye: "Well, Cap," he said aloud, "I'll go with you to find that gold mine!"

"Put her there!" said the revenue man, reaching out his broad hand.

"Don't squeeze too hard, Cap," rejoined Pete. "Those fingers of yours are like a vise. Have you made any plans for the trip?"

"Why," replied the other, "I do not suppose there will be any trouble about the journey to two old campaigners like you and me. We can get up to Sitka or Juneau easily enough by steamer or sailing vessel, and I suppose we'll have to hoof it from there, and set our course by compass. But what I want you for, is to do some of the planning. That

cocoanut of yours is better than mine when it comes to figuring out things."

Pete laughed as he gave a tug on the sheet to make the sloop lie a little closer. Then his face took on the look of concentration it wore when he was considering matters of importance. His confidence in himself had grown, and while he still avoided putting himself forward he had the consciousness of strength. So he answered:

"I believe you are going off half-cock, Cap. This affair is important, and to go to work on an inadequate scale would be apt to bring us back with no results. You seem to think a trip through that Alaskan wilderness is as easy as going to Puyallup. It will be the most arduous journey you ever undertook, and we'll have to start well prepared in order to win through. Everybody who has been there agrees that travelling in the interior is a hard game."

Kennedy's bluff countenance looked soberer as he listened, but at the end he set his long and obstinate jaw, and replied:

"Well, Pete, perhaps you're right. I have not thought much about that part of it. But this Frenchman was certainly up there, and I am willing to gamble you and I together can go where he did alone."

"No doubt," returned Pete, "though you must remember this man was a trapper, and had been

ranging over the country for years in the employ of the trading company, so he had a knowledge of the wilderness we lack. However, I do not see why we should undergo a lot of hardship and danger if we can avoid it. In the first place if we can get two more good, all-round men to go with us, I vote we take them."

"But," objected Kennedy, "how do we know there is gold enough in that creek to whack up among four? By the Beak of the Sacred Emu! I want to bring back enough bullion to last me the rest of my life. I've got my heart set on that, Pete."

"All right Cap," Pete answered with one of his infrequent smiles shooting across his dark face like sudden sunlight on a forest pool. "We can fix that. There is no need of taking the other two as partners. We can hire them! And I think we can go to the mouth of that creek in our own boat. If so, it will simplify matters."

The revenue man gave Pete a mighty slap on the shoulder:

"By the White Tuft of the Crimson Ibis!" he exclaimed, "You're right. Old Solomon couldn't have tipped it off better. That's what we'll do! We'll buy a little sealing schooner over in Victoria, and go right up in the Bering Sea to the Yukon delta. We can pick up a couple of sailors and a cook over there to take along with us. Jehosophat, that's great!"

"Perhaps we can do even better," interjected

Pete. "My notion is to get a good, seaworthy boat with a stout hull that'll stand hard usage, rig her for canvas, and put an engine in her so we can use the power as an auxiliary. About a forty foot hull, I should say, and thirty or forty horse power vertical engine. Then we would be fitted out for anything that could happen. I understand the engine."

The ex-revenue man stared at him in silent ecstasy. Pete continued:

"Now about the crew! I have got Tom Long, the Englishman we called Long Tom, working at the shingle mill."

"I remember him," said Kennedy. "We captured him in the attack on your father's house on Waldron a year and a half ago."

"He is a good sailorman," resumed Pete, "and loyal as Dope. We'll take him along, and pay him wages. And Cap, what has become of little Scotch Jimmy?"

"By the Tail of the Royal Baboon!" the Captain burst out. "Pete, you're a darling! He's just the man, and will be glad to go with us for forty dollars a month and board, and say—he can cook too!"

"Then," rejoined Pete, "don't you think we'd better put this thing in business shape? Let us, you and I, form a partnership for the purpose of finding this unknown creek, and capturing the bul-lion?"

"Hurrah!" agreed the revenue man. "We'll call

it the 'Yellowbird Gold Mining Company.' I elect you president and treasurer, and I'll take two thousand dollars worth of stock, and you can put in the same. Here's mine, I'll pay it in now to the treasurer."

He took a hidden belt from around his waist, and counted out two thousand dollars in broad, twenty-dollar-gold pieces. Captain Pete stowed them away in a rusty tin pan in the boat locker. Then with his fountain pen he wrote a receipt for the money on his knee, added a concise statement of the understanding between Kennedy and himself, and handed a copy of the paper to his friend, saying:

"All right, Cap, I'll put in the same amount, and be treasurer. Four thousand dollars ought to carry us through in good shape until we begin to handle the nuggets, and then we can make the mine pay expenses. You'd better hunt up Jimmy, for I am going to get down to work on this thing the minute we reach Cortesana. To-day is the twenty-first of May. I want to be off the mouth of the Yukon river by the tenth of July, and the Lord knows how long it is going to take to get there. You are liable to find floe ice in the Bering any time up to the middle of July, and we've got to go through that easy with our little boat, you know."

"I'll have Jimmy on hand. Don't you worry," returned the revenue officer confidently. "What else can I do to help you, Pete?"

"Nothing," he answered, as he trimmed his sail

and headed for the "P" street wharf which was now visible. "I'm going to take the next boat for Seattle, but I'll meet you on the first of June in Victoria. I'll come in that auxiliary boat, too."

"Good enough," answered Kennedy. "I suppose you'll buy the necessary supplies there?"

"Yes. Of the Hudson Bay Company," Pete replied. "They can outfit us with the right kind of goods. What fire arms have you got, Cap?"

"I'm pretty well fixed," answered the old warrior. "I've a heavy calibre Steven's rifle that I had made to order for me, and all sorts of revolvers. Will I need anything more?"

"Better take a shot gun along," Pete advised.

By this time the boy had let his halliards go, and was running the sloop on the sandy beach at the foot of the dock. After he had made everything snug, he transferred the twenty-dollar-gold pieces from the rusty pan to his pockets. Then he looked at his watch, and remarked:

"It is only three o'clock. I'll stop at Hagan's office and put this money in the safe, and have a talk with him."

"How long will you be, and where are you going afterwards?" asked Kennedy.

"About half an hour. I've got to go and get Dope at Linden's. Then I must run over to the shingle mill."

"This Linden?" inquired Kennedy. "Is he the S. P. C. A. man?"

"That's the one."

"Well, I know him. I guess I will make him and Dope a call. I'll wait there for you."

This suited Pete who had private matters to discuss with Mr. Hagan. The snappy, little real estate dealer looked up with a scowl when the door of his office opened, but as he recognised our hero a smile took its place, and he said in the tone he used only to his young friend:

"So you've returned. Did you get those shingle bolts?"

Pete drew up a chair to the corner of the old man's desk as he replied:

"Yes, sir. I secured all I went after. But something new has come up that I want to talk to you about. I have made up my mind to go away for a time."

Mr. Hagan's features fell into their ordinary expression again, and he snapped out at the top of his querulous voice:

"Going away? Going away! I should like to know what on earth you want to do that for! What silly idea have you got into your fool head now? Aren't you getting a grip on things here, and making more money than any other young fellow in Cortesana?"

Pete listened to this characteristic outbreak with a tender heart. He knew it was dictated by his friend's affection for him. As soon as he could edge a word in he started, without answering the

other's testy questions, where he had been interrupted:

"I am going to Alaska with Captain Kennedy, and may remain there six months or even a year."

He paused, for Mr. Hagan's face had turned an apoplectic red. He bounced from his chair:

"Alaska!" he exclaimed, "that howling and desolate wilderness! And with that adventurer Kennedy! Are you stark, staring mad? What are you going to do there?"

"Dig gold," answered Pete stoutly, thinking he might as well tell the worst at once.

Mr. Hagan fell back in his chair, and clutched at his scanty gray hair as he gazed at our hero in bewilderment. But the mention of the precious metal after a moment snapped his mind back to the practical consideration of material affairs which had been for fifty years his constant habit.

"Dig gold!" he snarled. "A mare's nest! Whoever heard of gold in the frozen North! You are mad!"

"No, sir," answered Pete. "Kennedy and I know of a large deposit on the upper waters of the Yukon. You ought to be well enough acquainted with me by this time, Mr. Hagan, to know I would not go into such an affair if I was not sure what I was about."

The old man had shot his bolt, and now he began to calm down and examine the affair.

"Tell me about it," he demanded.

Pete knew he could rely on his secrecy, and re-

lated the details of Kennedy's meeting with Blondin, his story of the discovery of the placer mine, and subsequent murder after having told the officer of the location of the creek. When the lad came to an end, he remained for some moments with his head on his hand in meditation.

"Pete," he said, and his voice had resumed its kindly intonation. "Do you know this sounds like a large affair. I see no reason to doubt Blondin's story, especially as it was backed up by the actual gold in that buckskin bag he showed the revenue man. And if there was bullion in such quantity in the creek he prospected, it is probable there is plenty of the metal in other places in that country. It looks to me as if a new Eldorado had been accidentally discovered by this fool Frenchman who let himself be killed when he was the sole possessor of such a piece of World Information as that."

Pete was about to speak, but the real estate man forestalled him, and continued:

"You and Kennedy had better padlock your tongues. Do not let another soul hear a whisper of what you have told me. Such news flies like a bird to the four corners of the earth. If Blondin's tale is true a million adventurers will congregate in that frozen land the moment the fact gets out. That brings me to the second point. I do not like it that the murderer or murderers have stolen the sketch of the mouth of the creek, along with the bag of nuggets, from the body. You have not attached

enough importance to this. Kennedy should put in his best detective work to find that murderer. He may know where Blondin had been for the last three years, and if he has an ounce of brains, he will make deductions leading him to the point you and Kennedy are headed for. Send the revenue officer back to Victoria by the first boat to take up the man hunt while you are making preparations for the journey. He may stumble on something of vital importance. Now let's see what arrangements we can make to keep your business interests from suffering during your absence."

When Pete left the old man had volunteered to shoulder his young favorite's affairs during the time he was in Alaska, and the boy saw Mr. Hagan did not intend he should lose a penny during his absence. He thanked him almost tearfully.

CHAPTER III

CAPTAIN PETE BUYS A BOAT

MR. LINDEN'S cottage stood in the rear of the lot. Kennedy was sitting with the S. P. C. A. agent on the piazza when Pete opened the gate. As he called out his greeting a great, yellow dog with a black face shot down the path. He stopped in front of Pete, and whined a fervent, canine greeting. His master put his hand fondly on the noble animal's head, and said:

"Well, old fellow, are you glad to see me back?"

Dope gazed in his face with devotion, and opened his mouth to answer in his own language, but his master raised his finger:

"That will do, Dope!" he said, and with mute obedience the dog stalked majestically by Pete's side. Linden observed energetically:

"By Jove, Pete, I'd give almost anything in the world but my wife, to own that dog. He is a remarkable brute. He's treated me as one gentleman would another, that he did not wish to become intimate with, ever since you went away. He will never change masters, and if you were taken from him, I think he would die of grief. And for genuine decency not many men can equal him. While

he wouldn't do more than be civil to me and Mrs. Linden, he has just devoted himself to my two-year old girl, and has taken better care of her than a nurse. I have seen the kid yanking at his black tongue that you are so proud of, and trying to dig out his eyes with her strong little fingers, but the noble old fellow never even whimpered."

"Yes," agreed Kennedy, "that dog worships Pete. Some day he'll kill some one that hits you, Pete!"

"Yes, he'd do that," said the boy. "Wouldn't you, Dope?"

As he pulled the silky ear the great dog put a massive paw on his breast, and looked in his face with solemn assurance.

On their way to the shingle mill Pete told the ex-revenue officer of the comment Hagan had made concerning the murder of Blondin, and the disappearance of the sketch and memorandum. Captain Kennedy was impressed by the warning:

"By the Serpent of the Nile!" he exclaimed. "That old boy is sharp. I missed a bet all right when I didn't start on the trail of the fellow who killed the Frenchman. I was as much interested in the crime as the Victoria police. Of course it may turn out the murder was committed by some accidental thug. On the other hand if some one who knew Blondin was a trapper for the Alaskan Trading Company, killed him to get those nuggets, it would be bad. That note book with the sketch of the mouth of the creek would make him sit up and

look about. He must have been slick, or uncommonly lucky, or he'd left some trace by which he could have been followed up."

"I suppose the sketch and notes were pretty crude," suggested Pete. "Was Blondin educated?"

"No. He could barely read and write," answered Kennedy. "It would probably be difficult for any one to decipher his notes, or interpret the sketch."

"Nevertheless," observed Pete, thoughtfully, "the nuggets were a sort of a sign post pointing in the direction of the creek, and—in fact, I have a heap of respect for Mr. Hagan's judgment. I believe you had better go back, and take up the trail. You can discover from the police what tough men are in Victoria, and look them over. You would be likely to spot anyone that answered the bill."

"You are dead right!" agreed the revenue man, "and I'll take the first boat."

"It leaves in half an hour from the 'P' street wharf," said alert Pete, looking at his watch, "and I'll see you off. We want to talk over matters a little more, anyway."

They headed for the dock discussing the points connected with their enterprise that needed consultation, and when the *Olympia* came in had formulated their plans.

"Goodby, Cap," Pete concluded as the other started for the gang plank. "Round up the mur-

derer, and we can start on our trip with less anxiety."

"If I rope him, I'll put my brand on his hide. I'll get Jimmy to help me, and start the search instanter. I hope I'll have news for you when you heave in sight with the new boat. What are you going to name her, Pete?"

"The Gracie!" called Pete, across the widening water.

He turned off "P" street on the short cut to the mill in deep thought. Dope trotted behind, and every time his master straightened his knee he felt the slight touch of the faithful mastiff's black muzzle on the calf of his leg. It was a sight worth seeing, but the inhabitants of Cortesana were so accustomed to the spectacle that it attracted no comment.

As the lad entered the mill office he beckoned to a sturdy, sailor-like man who was superintending a gang of workmen in the yard.

"Hello, Tom," said he. "How are you getting along?"

"Right as a trivet, Mr. Graignic," answered the other looking at our hero with almost the same expression of devotion that Dope wore when accosted by his master. "All the better for seeing you, sir."

"You remember that smuggling scrape Kennedy and I helped you out of, don't you, Tom?" asked Pete kindly. "You are a faithful fellow. I am go-

ing to take a long, dangerous trip, and I need a man like you with me. Will you go, Tom?"

"I'm ready to start to-night, sir," he answered with a readiness that disdained to ask questions.

"Have you ever been to Alaska, Tom?" Pete inquired.

"No, sir," he replied. "Is it there? Not that it makes any difference to me."

Pete laughed:

"Yes, Tom, and you will find it a pretty hard trip before we are through."

Tom rubbed his huge fists against each other, and his eyes began to brighten:

"It'll be on shipboard, sir?" he said interrogatively.

As Pete nodded his respectful smile grew broader, and he continued:

"I have been hungering for a taste of salt water! It's in the blood, sir, and I've been along shore a weary while. If it hadn't been that it meant leaving you, I'd have been off before this. When do we start, sir?"

"Well, Tom, you had better get your dunnage ready. We'll go to Seattle by the night boat. Captain Kennedy and I are going to buy an auxiliary launch, and make a voyage to Alaska—perhaps up the Yukon River—at any rate we shall be gone all summer and maybe remain longer. Captain Kennedy is waiting in Victoria, and I have got to get the launch. Probably Jimmy, the little

Scotchman, will be along with us as cook. How does the idea suit you?"

"Bang up, sir! Suits me down to the ground!"

Pete stopped him as he was about to make a bee line for his quarters, and said:

"You'd better get your time, Tom, and draw what is coming to you. Meet me at the 'P' street wharf at eight o'clock when the *North Pacific* comes in."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Pete told his manager he was going away for a time and had left the control of his affairs with Mr. Hagan, to whom he should look for orders. Then he went to his own office in the brick building he had erected on the "P" street lot purchased from Mr. Hagan on the first day Cortesana was laid out. Pete had reserved a large room in the rear, and here he kept his private belongings, and "batched" while in the city. In a rack in one corner were several handsome rifles of the latest pattern, and a superb Paradox shotgun presented to him by the grateful Collector shortly after the foiling of the Cloon conspiracy. This gun was made in London by a celebrated English manufacturer, and was intended for big game hunting in Africa. It would either utilize small shot, or when necessary an infernally destructive explosive bullet guaranteed to bring down a lion or an elephant.

Pete handled the weapons lovingly as he took them apart and packed them in their cases. He put them in a large sea chest his father had given him

when he left Waldron Island. He had preserved this chest out of loyalty to his early surroundings, and as he threw open the lid his memory turned wistfully back to the time when the unkempt fisher boy of San Juan County left his home, and started out in the world for himself. He knew his Indian mother would sympathise with the longings which led him to embark on his present adventure, and he wondered what his sagacious old father would say to the enterprise. Then his face suddenly lighted up:

"Why," he muttered, "of course! When I come up from Seattle in the new boat, I'll drop in at Waldron on my way to Victoria, and see them. If it wasn't for mother and the kiddies I bet Dad would go along."

After he had stowed the guns in his chest he took the revolver from the wall. It was the one Captain Kennedy had given him the night they captured Mike McGovern and Three-fingered Bill on Lopez Island. He took it apart, cleaned, and oiled it thoroughly, and stowed it in a specially lined hip pocket where it would rest without attracting observation. Then he called an expressman, and had the chest taken down to the wharf to await the boat.

According to program he took supper with Mr. Hagan. Now that the adventure had been decided on he had thought the matter over to considerable purpose, and gave the lad suggestions that Pete

carefully put away in his memory, and profited by more than once.

Long Tom was at hand when they walked down to the wharf in the Puget Sound twilight. He was dressed in a nautical white duck suit, and looked every inch a sailor as he crossed the gang plank carrying his dunnage in a round-bottomed canvas bag.

They put up at the Hotel Northern in Seattle, and Pete got busy among the shippers. While thus occupied he sent Long Tom along the wharves that skirt Elliott Bay to see what he could find. Plenty of vessels were on hand, but they were just the ones the lad did not want. As he returned to the hotel he was inclined to abandon the search in Seattle, and purchase a sealing schooner in Victoria. Then he reflected that such a vessel would be of little use to the exploring party ascending that sixteen hundred miles of the mighty Yukon. He knew the current of the river ran from four miles an hour where it was broadest up to eight or nine miles where the banks narrowed. The trip seemed impossible except by steam.

As he entered the rotunda of the hotel Long Tom greeted him in considerable excitement:

"Boss," he said, "I have found a boat I think will suit, although it is not quite what you laid out to get."

Pete brightened up, and said quickly:

"Good for you, Tom! I haven't seen a single

craft the whole day that would answer my purpose. What have you got?"

"The owner is in the bar."

Pete followed, and Tom introduced him to a burly, middle-aged man by the name of Hanks. It appeared he was a freight-boat captain on the Sound, and was obliged to sell his swift, powerful little craft because a widowed sister had recently died in Chicago, and left several young children whose welfare demanded his immediate presence in that city. He was anxious to dispose of his boat for almost any money in order to get away as soon as possible.

The *Gamecock* lay at a wharf in the upper town, and Pete did not even stop to get dinner. They jumped on a Belmont car, and in fifteen minutes were at the dock. Pete was delighted the moment he set eyes upon the vessel. It was a powerful river tug whose ability was out of all proportion to its size. It was flat-bottomed, but Captain Hanks, who was by way of being an inventor, had fitted her with what he called a "detachable keel." He claimed this made her capable of going anywhere on the ocean, and when "detached" reduced her draft to two feet, which was indispensable in river traffic. The engines were of the newest pattern, and had been put in the hull ten months before. He guaranteed her to make steam on wood or coal indifferently, and said if he had her hawser at-

tached to a house he could pull it after him into deep water.

The *Gamecock* had an after cabin and three state rooms off it. There was an up-to-date galley, and room in the hold, to carry considerable cargo. Hanks said she had coal in the bunkers, and was ready to put to sea. Her coal consumption was large but Pete anticipated no trouble in procuring fuel in his trip to the North, and he could always substitute wood—which was plentiful and cheap—for coal.

“What do you want for the *Gamecock* just as she is—cash down on the nail?” asked Pete.

Hanks considered a moment, and then said:

“Do you really mean business, sir?”

“You bet your life I do,” answered Pete.

“Give me eight hundred dollars, and she is yours,” affirmed Hanks, looking Pete straight in the eye.

“Sit down at that table, and write out your bill of sale,” said Pete. “Here is your money.”

He drew out his cheque book and fountain pen, filled a cheque for the amount, and held it awaiting the bill of sale Hanks was laboriously transcribing. When he had finished he passed the blotted document to Pete, and received the cheque. Hanks looked at it with a little bewilderment, but before he could speak Pete said:

“Now if you will come back with me to the Hotel

Northern I will get the manager to give you the cash for that piece of paper."

Hanks face lighted up as he answered:

"Thank you, sir. You see," he added, "I ain't much accustomed to doing business with anything but the hard cash."

Pete smiled, put the bill of sale in his pocketbook, and they started back. Mr. Brown, the manager, happened to have bought some Cortesana lots of Pete, and knew him and his financial status. He did not hesitate a moment, but said to Hanks:

"Just slap your name on the back of that."

He went to the safe, and from an inner drawer took out forty double eagles, and handed them to Hanks.

This closed the transaction. Hanks was anxious to show his appreciation of the way our hero did business, and invited him and Tom Long to dinner. They went to the famous Chop House in the alley off Cherry Street, and had a meal that would have done credit to a Delmonico *chef*.

CHAPTER IV

PETE BIDS GOODBY TO PUGET SOUND

IN a small room in a building on Post street in Victoria, the capital of British Columbia, Captain Kennedy sat in meditation. Things had not gone to suit him, and his investigation into the Blondin murder was leading in a direction that made him dread future developments.

“By the Jumping Kangaroo!” he muttered to himself, “this matter is growing mixed up and unsatisfactory. It looks to me as if the trail of Blondin’s murderer is leading towards the Chinese colony. That piece of blue cloth these English police sized up to be torn from a pair of overalls came off a Chinaman’s blouse, and putting it together with the opium pipe stem I picked up by the back door of the shack, it looks as if these Oriental cusses had something to do with the crime. They are hard to track as I have found out before. Well,” he said, more cheerfully, “there’s one lucky thing about it! It is not probable that a Chinaman will pick up the clue to the Blondin mine.”

There was a short knock at the door. It opened without awaiting permission, and a little, sandy-haired, smooth-faced man entered the room.

"Hallo, Jimmy," said the Captain. "What have you found out?"

The Scot's rigid face relaxed into an expression of satisfaction as he unwrapped a small bundle.

"What have you got there?" asked Kennedy with interest.

"I found it in the ash barrel in front of Lee Sing's store."

He spread on the table in front of Kennedy a blue blouse such as is worn by Chinamen of the middle class. A large piece was torn from the bosom, and there were dull stains on the garment which made Kennedy thrill with excitement. He took a magnifying glass from his pocket, and examined one of the spots minutely. Then he wetted the end of his forefinger, and rubbed it on the place. When he took it away the end was stained red, and he exclaimed:

"Blood, by the living Jingo!"

"It wasn't in the barrel on the sidewalk at twelve o'clock last night, but I got it at daylight this morning," observed the Scotchman.

"Yes," nodded Kennedy. "I'm surprised at Lee Sing. Such a carelessness is not like him, or his tribe."

If the reader looks back to page 86 of "Captain Pete of Puget Sound," he will find some information in regard to this Chinaman of the name Lee Sing. At that time Kennedy first made the acquaintance of the fisher boy who was visiting Vic-

toria with his father in the sloop *Tyee*. The revenue man had treated Pete to a trip through the Chinese Quarter. Pete was greatly interested, and they finally entered a tea store.

"The air of the room was warm and a peculiar fragrance struck Pete as unlike anything he had ever smelt before. He was inclined to attribute it to rare spices, or something of that sort, but the officer called his attention to a fat Celestial sitting behind the counter smoking a long-stemmed pipe with a thick bowl that had a little hole the size of a pea in the center. It was the smoke from this that made the smell, and what was being smoked was opium instead of tobacco. This man was evidently the proprietor, for a clerk sat nearby making queer inscriptions with a brush in a blank book."

While Kennedy and Pete were in the store another man entered whom Kennedy recognized as a desperate smuggler, and a side partner of Kelly whom Pete had been instrumental in capturing in Dog Fish Pass. After they had left the store Kennedy said:

" 'I wonder what Mike McGovern was doing in Lee Sing's?' "

" 'Is that the name of the fat Chinaman who sat behind the counter?' " asked Pete.

" 'Yes.' "

" 'Then I guess they had some business together they didn't want you to know, for I saw Lee Sing making signs to Mike that we were there.' "

The boy's quickness of eye was the cause of putting Kennedy on the scent of the opium run that the Chinaman and McGovern were engaged in, and the eventual capture of Mike. The astute and unscrupulous Lee Sing was a leader in the illicit opium trade at that time being extensively carried on between Victoria on the British, and Port Townsend on the American side.

Kennedy was, in truth, a good deal surprised to find Lee Sing involved in the present affair. He had not believed the Chinaman to be inclined to violent crime. At the same time he was aware there was very little that a vicious Chinese would stop at when there was money in sight. On thinking the matter over he came to the conclusion it was improbable the Celestial had attached significance to papers found on the murdered Frenchman.

"I'll report the matter to Captain Pete," he said. "And see what he thinks about it."

Pete and Long Tom were on board the *Gamecock* shortly after daylight. The second inspection proved even more satisfactory than the one of the day preceding.

"I'll have to put a couple of short spars in her and change her into a schooner," said Pete to Long Tom.

"That's easy done, sir," remarked the English man-of-war's man.

"Yes," agreed Pete. "I'll put the main mast just forward of the main hatch."

"What sail are you going to carry, sir?"

"Fore-sail, jib, and mainsail," replied Pete.

Our hero concluded he would fit her out with the necessary spars at Cortesana. He contracted with Hank's former mate to go with them as far as Victoria while Long Tom agreed to act as fireman for the nonce. Before starting the lad bought a number of bolts of duck on Long Tom's assurance that he could cut and fit the sails.

After dinner they started for Cortesana. Pete created quite a sensation when he tied the *Gamecock* to the "P" street wharf, and his acquaintances thronged about the vessel full of curiosity to know what he intended to do with the tug. He did not give them much satisfaction, and was forced to tell a number of white lies to account for it.

Long Tom had at once set out to hunt up the necessary spars, and Pete took a number of measurements of the bow to carry out an idea that had occurred to him while they were coming from Seattle. His intention was to make a false bulk-head at his mill. He thought he could cut and fit pieces of heavy timber in such a way that they could be stowed in the hold, and joined together when the necessity arose to protect the bow from the ice. It was on the principle of a portable house. In fact this preventer bulk-head turned out to be of importance before the end of the perilous voyage.

Long Tom had no difficulty finding masts. He got two short and rather heavy ones, and thirty-

six hours after they had arrived they were stepped, and stayed with wire shrouds. Pete's false bulkhead was sawed out, numbered piece by piece, and stowed away in the hold. Long Tom also measured and fitted the sails ready to be sewed by the sail-maker when they reached Victoria.

Old Mr. Hagan could hardly tear himself away from the vessel. To Pete's amusement the spirit of adventure which inspired the enterprise had taken such complete possession of the old real estate dealer that he neglected his business to watch the interesting proceedings on board the *Gamecock*.

"Good by, Pete," he said, wringing the boy's hand as they were about to cast off the mooring lines. "Good-by, my boy. I believe you'll have a good time after all, and I hope you will come back with the cabin filled with gold."

The first port the *Gamecock* made was Port Townsend. As soon as she was tied up, Pete made for the Collector's residence. Grace saw him coming up the street and admitted him at the door. She had grown to be a lovely girl.

"There's nobody home but me," said she with a twinkle of pleasure at the involuntary delight displayed in Pete's swarthy features over this information. "Where on earth have you come from, Captain Pete, and why are you looking so elated?"

"Why, Grace, dear," he answered, "of course I'm tickled to death to see you again, and I have got some astonishing news."

"What is it?" asked the girl eagerly, as they sat down hand in hand.

"I shall start for Alaska with Captain Kennedy by the first of June to be gone a year."

The vivid color faded from Grace's face as her white hand clutched Pete's brown one more tightly.

"What do you mean, you crazy boy?" she demanded.

In reply Pete told her the story. He bound her to secrecy, explaining that it was all important that no hint of the matter should reach outside ears. On the eve of the separation she permitted herself to show her affection plainly. While she was not so much interested in the prospective profits of the enterprise, she was inclined to be proud that her hero should engage in something that would demonstrate his manhood to the world. Secretly, she thought of him as a knight-errant of old starting on a quest for the purpose of laying treasure at the feet of his lady love. A vein of ardent romance ran through her temperament, and she acknowledged that the only objection she had to the adventure was that Pete would be unable to keep her posted by letter of his daily life.

Pete only told the Collector he was going with Captain Kennedy on a pleasure trip to the Yukon River, and the Collector knew them sufficiently well to understand how much enjoyment they would get out of such an exploring party. They insisted on

the boy remaining to dinner, and then he bade them adieu.

When he anchored in front of Mr. Graignic's cottage the old fisherman and his Indian wife hurried down to the shore to greet their boy. Pete had not been home for months, and his mother was speechless with joy over his unexpected appearance.

Since Tom Fisher had first visited Captain Pete the fisherman's cottage had become an almost pretentious residence. Mr. Graignic was now a prosperous man, and had a substantial balance in the Port Townsend National Bank. He had built a roomy addition to his house, and had a well furnished parlor that his Indian wife religiously kept out of—except while sweeping and dusting it. She never sat there herself, although Pete had sent a sumptuous "patent rocker" for her especial delectation.

After the others had retired, the fisherman and his son sat by the window—in which the father in years ago had always placed the lamp to serve as beacon for Pete—looking out through the soft moonlight on the *Gamecock* moored in the still water.

"Now, Dad," commenced Pete, "I want to tell you something that will interest you." He had not said a word so far of the quest for gold. "Captain Kennedy and I have bought this boat to go to Alaska in. We think we know of a great deposit of gold on the upper reaches of the Yukon River."

For the third time, Pete told the story. The excitable Frenchman twitched his hands, shuffled his feet, and jerked about convulsively as he listened to the tale of Blondin, the murdered gold digger. When it was finished he sat in silence. The pressure of his interlocked fingers showed white on his knuckles. Then his head straightened on his shoulders like a war horse who sniffs the battle from afar, and he started impetuously to speak. A second thought overtook him, and little by little the radiant light died in his eye, and the eagerness faded from his features.

"Sacre!" he ejaculated. "For a moment, Pete, I forgot myself, and zought I was going wiz you!"¹

"Why don't you come?" quietly asked his son.

The blood mounted in the old man's face until it was red as a lobster. Then he answered reproachfully:

"Don't tempt me, Pete! I'd give my head to be wiz you, but your mozer and ze kids—I can't leave zem! It wouldn't be right. You know it as well as I."

"Well, perhaps that's so," admitted his son.

"Hagan was right," observed the fisherman thoughtfully. "It's a discovery zat will shake ze whole world before it is done. If Blondin discovered zis rich deposit on ze Yukon zere is probably gold distributed zrough zat geological formation

¹ Mr. Graignic's Gallic lisp is described on page 36 of "Captain Pete Of Puget Sound."

all over ze north. It is a wonderful zing for you and Kennedy to be on ze ground first. But you will find you cannot hold it in your own hands. Ze secret will soon be out, and zere will be a rush like zat which made California famous in '49, when Sutter gazed ze first grains of gold from ze breast of his mill dam."

"That's about what Mr. Hagan seemed to think," agreed Pete meditatively. "We will have to be cautious, and work as swiftly as possible. I hope to gracious the slayers of Blondin did not get any clue."

"At all events," concluded the old man, knocking the ashes out of his pipe and arising, "if you will take me for a passenger, I am going as far as Victoria on ze *Gamecock* to see you off."

"That's bully," assented Pete as they went to bed.

Daylight had just broke when Pete was aroused by the deep bay of Dope, who had followed him ashore the night before, and slept on the door step. As he looked out of the window, he saw a boat containing Long Tom leave the *Gamecock*. He sung out:

"All right, old fellow!" to the dog, and dressed himself at once. The fisherman was making the fire in the kitchen as he came down, and said:

"We'll have Long Tom to breakfast for ze sake of old times. I've got some razor-edge clams zat I'll fry in batter."

Long Tom had a warm spot in his heart for the

old fisherman, and was delighted to be once more on Waldron Island, albeit his first experience in that locality had been more exciting than pleasant.¹

Mrs. Graignic had added fried chicken to the bill of fare for breakfast, and they shortly sat down in the bright, early Puget Sound morning to a bountiful meal that carried Pete back to the days of his boyhood.

There was a pathetic expression on the Indian mother's face as she said good bye to her grown-up son. She had never become reconciled to his civilized career, successful as it had been. In her heart she would have preferred him to share the daily life of the family, instead of being a prosperous man of affairs in what seemed to her the vast and populous city of Cortesana. With the stoical courage of her race, however, she repressed her emotions and resigned herself to fate.

¹ See chapters twenty-two and twenty-three of Captain Pete Of Puget Sound. Ed.

CHAPTER V

PREPARATIONS FOR THE VOYAGE—JOE FLOYD JOINS THE ADVENTURERS

“WELL,” said Pete, “how do you like her, Cap?”

Kennedy had identified the *Gamecock* as she came to an anchor in the Arm. Pete had brought her here rather than tie her at the dock. He was afraid the unusual character of her rig would excite inquisitiveness.

“She’ll do well enough,” replied Kennedy. “She is larger than I expected. I am glad you got along so soon.”

“Any news?” inquired Pete.

“Yes! Do you remember Lee Sing, Pete? The Chinese tea dealer, in whose store you and I met Mike McGovern a couple of years ago?”

“I do—mighty well! What of him?”

“Well, it looks a good deal like he framed the job, if he didn’t do the actual killing, in the Blondin affair.”

“Tell me all about it,” said Pete.

Kennedy related how he had found the stem of an opium pipe in a crevice of the stone step at the rear door of Blondin’s cabin. How Scotch Jimmy,

who was now in the employ of Graignic & Kennedy, Gold hunters, had found a torn and stained blouse in the ash-can in front of Lee Sing's tea store. The city police picked up a piece of the same cloth in Blondin's shack the day after the murder. They had diagnosed it as coming from dungaree overalls, and had followed the clue on that interpretation. Kennedy was convinced the fragment was torn from the blouse Jimmy had found in the ash-can. Kennedy had been unobtrusively hunting up Lee Sing's antecedents. He discovered enough to convince him the Chinaman had once been commanding officer on one of the piratical junks which infest the China and Zooloo seas.

"Cap," said Pete, "we're going to have trouble. We had better put the 'Yellowbird Gold Mining Company' on a war footing."

"Do you think Lee Sing is on the track of the Alaska gold through Blondin's map?"

"With Orientals there is never any limit to what may happen. I believe Lee Sing is craftier than a fox, unscrupulous as a hyena, and untiring as a timber wolf. He's intelligent, too. If he has the slightest inkling he will follow the thread up until he reaches the end of the coil sixteen hundred miles up the Yukon River."

"Whew!" gasped Kennedy.

"We must not waste time!" continued Pete. "I'm going to clear for Sitka inside of the next forty-eight hours. We ought to have another

hand, Cap. Do you know of any first-class man who would be inclined to go with us?"

Kennedy could think of no one entirely desirable.

"Well, have your eye out for one," concluded Pete. "Long Tom will keep ship, and I'll go ashore with you. No, Dope," he added as the mastiff put a paw on his breast, "you'd be in the way."

Dope looked disappointed, but lay down again.

It happened that Pete did not have to go far for the additional man he wanted. His first stop was at a gloomy-looking stone ware-house on the waterfront. It has already been described to Captain Pete's friends, and was in fact the store and supply depot of the Hudson Bay Company. That powerful old-world corporation has, since the first settlement of Northwestern America, controlled the trade with the Indians and made enormous profits through possessing a monopoly in the fur business, and other products of the vast country known as British North America. Its forts, and supply and trading stations, dotted over the whole territory, were manned by employees who gathered up the trade and enabled the Company to defy competition. Although unpretentious, this huge, stone building was massive and English in character. It carried as large and varied stock as had at that time ever been brought together in one building. This was essential, as the Company not only supplied the meager wants of the savages, but fitted

out its employees who, to the number of thousands, were scattered throughout the Northwest. Its business extended to the wildest recesses of Assiniboia and Saskatchewan. All these establishments drew their supplies from Victoria, which was itself a Hudson's Bay settlement. Fifty years ago it only contained the fort and station of the Company. It has grown to be a beautiful English city of one hundred and twenty-five thousand inhabitants.

Pete came in collision with a man as he entered the swing door. Each drew back, and started to apologise. As Pete got a fair view of the other, he said:

"Why, I believe it is Joe Floyd of McNiel's Island. Don't you remember me, Mr. Floyd? I am Pete Graignic, little Murph's friend."

Joe looked down on Pete, for he overtopped him by six inches. He answered with a drawl that was not in keeping with the alert glance of his keen, wintry blue eyes:

"Cap'n Pete of Puget Sound, and afterwards of Cortesana, I reckon?" said he interrogatively.

Pete nodded, seeming extraordinarily glad to meet him.

"What are you doing so far away from home, Mr. Floyd?" he asked pleasantly.

"Why," replied Joe, "I just sold that there ranch of mine on McNiel's to an Englishman, and I come over here to get my money."

Pete introduced Kennedy, who had followed him

into the building, to Floyd. The two men sized each other up with appreciation. Both were in the prime of life and each appeared endowed with the strength of a giant, while their alert movements indicated that their size did not handicap them in the matter of activity. Kennedy understood in a moment that Pete had Floyd in mind as the necessary recruit.

"Have you concluded your deal?" asked Pete.

"Got the cash in my clothes," drawled the rancher.

"Joe," exclaimed Captain Pete suddenly and frankly, "Kennedy and I are looking for a man of your build. Are you open to an engagement?"

"Well, say," interrogated Joe, "do I have to have a character?"

The gold miners smiled, and Kennedy put in:

"We'll take you on trust, Floyd!"

"I reckon you'll have to," said the latter. "What is it? I'm foot free."

"If you've got time," said Pete, after a moment's reflection, "come along with us to Kennedy's room, and we'll talk the matter over."

Five minutes after, as they sat around the table, Pete said to Kennedy:

"Cap, Joe Floyd is a man we can tie to. I know he can be relied upon through thick and thin. What do you say if we take him in on the first floor of the 'Yellowbird Gold Mining Company,' and

offer him ten per cent. of the profits if he is willing to join us?"

Floyd drew his long legs more closely to the chair, and shifted his huge, gaunt frame so he had a clear view of their faces. Kennedy knew his young friend was sure of his ground when he made a break of this kind. Without perceptible hesitation, he answered:

"Whatever you say goes, Pete."

"Gold mining?" inquired Joe Floyd politely. "I follered it some in Californy before I came to the Sound."

The firm of Kennedy & Graignic exchanged glances of satisfaction, and Pete opened up the Blondin matter. Floyd did not interrupt, and as he listened his face took on a look of power that surprised the others. At the end he spoke in the decisive accent of a man of action.

"That 'ere is a mighty interestin' yarn. There ain't no doubt of the gold being in Alaska. I have always suspicioned it. I ain't got nobody to consult but myself, and I accept your proposition. Ten per cent. of the finding, and you pay expenses. Put it in writin' Captain Pete, so I can leave it to Murph's mother if I should be wiped out on the trip."

Pete wrote out a memorandum of the agreement, and handed it to the rancher.

"What about the Chinaman part of this busi-

ness?" inquired Joe, after a moment's reflection. "I never knowed but one Chinaman I could trust, and he's right here in Victoria."

"They're risky animals to put confidence in," remarked Pete tentatively.

"Sure as shooting," confirmed Kennedy

"That's so!" resumed Joe Floyd. "But when I know a man, I know him down to the ground. This fellow, Ah Fat, follered me up to the Sound, and worked with me four years when I was ranching in Skagit County. He's white clear through from front to back."

While the rancher was making this strong statement, Pete and Kennedy were regarding one another inquiringly.

"What do you think, Pete?" asked Kennedy doubtfully.

"I hardly know," replied our hero with some indecision. "On the whole, I'm inclined to believe that when Joe Floyd says he knows a thing, he knows it pretty well."

"All right! Go ahead," said Kennedy.

Pete turned to Floyd:

"Joe, if this Celestial friend of yours is now in Victoria, Kennedy and I want you to put him on the job of finding out all he can about Lee Sing, the tea merchant, and how far he was connected with the Blondin murder."

"Good enough," returned Joe. "I'll lay him on the trail to-night."

"There's no time to lose," resumed Pete. "The *Gamecock* clears for Sitka day after to-morrow. I suppose I'll have to take out papers. We'll leave in the night so as not to attract attention."

At this point Pete's father joined them, and the conference broke up. Mr. Graignic had rustled up three sail-makers, and sent them aboard the *Gamecock*. Joe had private business, and the other three rowed out in the small boat that had been purchased with the tug.

"I am glad you got Floyd," said the fisherman. "You'll find him all wool and a yard wide, and I've heard he's as good a woodsman as zere is on ze coast."

When they reached the *Gamecock* they found two men in a boat talking to Tom Long.

"Here are the bosses now!" exclaimed he. "Tell them what you want."

The strangers were two hardy and vigorous, but rough looking fellows. The one who held the oars was almost as tall as Joe Floyd. The socket of one of his eyes was vacant, and the scar of a great gash disfigured that side of his face. Altogether, he was a vicious-looking customer.

"We thought, sir," he said, "that maybe you wanted to hire a couple of good hands if you're going off on a trip in this hooker."

"Where do you want to go?" inquired Pete tersely.

"We ain't particular, sir. Anywhere you're

bound for." This last was said rather inquiringly, and made Pete suspicious.

The lad knew he was treading a pathway set with snares, and was inclined to question anything out of the ordinary. It was unusual for sailors hunting a berth to come to such a craft as the *Gamecock*. He considered a moment, and inquired:

"What wages do you fellows want?"

"Whatever's going!" said the tall fellow eagerly. "What might the v'y'ge be, sir?"

This question was asked with a sudden glare of interest.

"We're thinking of a trip to Sitka," said Pete.

The big fellow bared a pair of yellow fangs in a grin:

"That will suit, sir, down to the ground!" he announced.

"But—" added Pete, "I can't afford to pay wages. We're going on a sort of trading trip, and have got to keep down expenses."

"That's all right, sir!" agreed the other promptly. "We'll go on a lay."

Pete's suspicions were confirmed, although he could not for the life of him see how anyone could suspect the intention of the *Gamecock's* voyage. He felt convinced, however, that there was some hidden purpose in the offer of these outcasts to join them.

"All right," he said finally. "There's plenty of time. We won't be ready to clear for a week.

Come around in seven days, and perhaps we'll give you a berth."

This concluded the interview, and Kennedy and Pete retired to the cabin. Before he went below, Pete said quietly to Long Tom:

"Don't let those fellows come aboard, Tom."

Tom answered promptly:

"No, sir. I wouldn't like that one-eyed chap for a ship mate."

About eleven o'clock that night a bellow from Dope rang out over the waters as a canoe shot alongside the *Gamecock*. Pete was on deck the next moment, and heard the hail of—

"*Gamecock* ahoy!" in Joe Floyd's voice.

"That you, Joe?" he inquired.

"Yes," answered the rancher. "I thought as I've shipped for the v'y'ge I'd sleep on board."

"That's right!" answered Pete heartily. "Come right aboard." As Joe stepped over the rail with the painter of the canoe in his hand, Dope thrust his inquiring nose ahead of his master. "Have you ever met Dope?" asked the boy.

"No," returned Floyd, putting his hand boldly on the huge black head, "but I've heard of him plenty. Oh, you needn't be afeard he'll bother me, sir!" he continued, as Pete hastily put his hand on the mastiff's collar. "There ain't no animal, tame or wild, that I can't get along with."

Dope's conduct certainly confirmed this statement. Contrary to his habit, he received Joe's

caress with pleasure, and concluded by planting both paws on his breast, and licking his face. Pete watched the dog with amazement.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "Joe Floyd, you're certainly all right! When Dope says so, that settles it."

The rancher told Pete he had seen Ah Fat, and would get a report from him in the morning. He said Lee Sing had a bad reputation among the more respectable residents of the Chinese colony, and was reputed to be a dangerous man, in spite of his inoffensive appearance.

The twenty-eighth of May was a busy day on board the *Gamecock*. Pete had purchased a year's outfit of stores, and clothing. He did not neglect to lay in a supply of tools such as would be required in their mining operations, and, on Floyd's advice, he included a number of gimcracks and gewgaws for trading with the Aborigines on the voyage through the interior of Alaska.

Long Tom had attended to fitting the boat for the voyage. His standing and running rigging, together with the sails, were all in place. At twelve o'clock he came to Pete and Kennedy, who were standing on the quarter deck, and touching his hat respectfully in his formal British style, reported:

"All ready to break anchor, sir!"

Pete beckoned to Floyd, his father, and Scotch

Jimmy, who were in the bow, and when all were assembled, said:

“One thing remains to be done. This boat has got to be re-christened.” At this point Kennedy winked violently at Joe Floyd, whose eye he happened to catch. Joe looked puzzled, but Pete continued: “I’m going to turn the *Gamecock* into the *Gracie*, and I’ve got a bottle of champagne down in the cabin that I’m going to use for the baptism.”

He darted below, and returned with a quart bottle of Clicquot. They all followed him to the bow, and he clambered out on the sprit.

“Here’s good luck to the *Gracie* and her crew!” he said.

He cracked the bottle on the stem of the boat, and they all took off their hats.

CHAPTER VI

THROUGH THE INSIDE PASSAGE

FLOYD went ashore during the afternoon to receive Ah Fat's report. It confirmed what Kennedy had learned about Lee Sing, with the addition that he had brought with him from China several desperadoes who had been members of his piratical crew. These men were supposed to be at the beck of the pseudo Celestial merchant whenever he needed them in the unlawful enterprises in which he was known to engage. Ah Fat also said Lee Sing had confederates among the lower class of criminal whites who peopled the slums of Victoria.

Before dark, Pete had a surprise. An incoming steamer brought Mr. Hagan from Cortesana. The old real estate dealer was attired in an absurd British touring suit, and wore a striped fore-and-after cap which took twenty years off his age, and gave him a rakish appearance at variance with his real character. He explained that he only came to see the boy off, and went over the clearance papers with anxious care. Pete had not failed to attend to this point. He had also hunted up an old mariner who had sailed on the northern route to Sitka many years, and was familiar with the waters of

the Inland Passage. This man laid out a course for him to follow, and said that with good seamanship they should be able to reach Sitka in six days.

In the early afternoon all the preparations were concluded and Pete, whom Kennedy insisted should be in command of the expedition, announced that they were ready to sail. Mr. Hagan and the fisherman, after warm adieus, took their departure on the four o'clock boat.

Three hours after, the crew of the *Gracie* tore her anchor from the mud bottom of the Arm, and headed out through the strait of Haro through narrow Active Pass into the straits of Georgia. They had steam up, and caught a fair tide, running at least six knots, and churned along at a merry rate into the entrance of that wonderful passage which extends with hardly a break from Victoria to Sitka. Many books have been published giving descriptions of this unparalleled voyage, but although all are enthusiastic, few have succeeded in giving any real idea of the difficulties of navigation, and the astounding scenery of the voyage.

Since Pete and his companions fared forth on their adventurous trip, it has become a world thoroughfare. As sagacious old Mr. Hagan predicted, the news of Blondin's discovery was afterwards wafted to the four quarters of the earth, and a stream of gold seekers, not only from America, but from Europe, and even from Australia in the Antipodes, hurried eagerly to the spot where

gold was as plentiful as the pebbles in the streams.

The *Gracie* had a covered wheel-house at the stern, and when they were fairly away Pete assembled his ship's crew in this little apartment. Kennedy, Floyd and Long Tom lined up. Scotch Jimmy was at the wheel. Captain Pete announced that it was customary for the commanding officer to preach a sermon to his crew at the beginning of the voyage, and he was going to begin that way:

"In the first place," he said. "It is unnecessary to have any class distinction in this company. For instance, I do not see why we should not eat at the same table, and the same kind of grub. It will be necessary, of course, to form ourselves into two watches. Each member of the crew shall have his especial line of duty, for the execution of which he must consider himself responsible. Jimmy, you've got to take charge of the galley, and be the cook. It is an important place, and if you don't treat us well, you're apt to get into trouble."

"You bet your life," confirmed Kennedy.

"Tom Long," proceeded Pete, "I guess you're the most competent sailor among us, and I appoint you chief deck hand, and fireman in emergency—when we are using the engine. What kind of a sailor man are you, Joe?" he asked, turning to Floyd.

The big man said meditatively:

"I reckon I can handle a canoe or even a row boat as well as the next, but I confess I ain't much

on these big craft. When it comes down to the weather, though, I'm a regular old barometer."

"All right," said Pete, "you shall be second deck hand, and have charge of the weather bureau. Now, Captain Kennedy, you are to be the military chief of the campaign. You must look after the weapons and ammunition, and when war is declared, you'll have to take charge. I myself will be responsible for the stores, and the handling of the *Gracie* generally. I guess there's enough to keep us all out of mischief. Has anybody any suggestions to make?"

Long Tom raised his head as if about to speak, but Kennedy took the words out of his mouth.

"You've left out the engineer," exclaimed he.

"Of course," responded Pete. "I will be chief engineer in addition to the rest of my duties. I've knocked about machinery a bit, and I understand this engine. I am confident I can even mend it if it breaks down. If any accident happens, I have little doubt of my ability to put things straight again."

"Then that seems to settle it," said Kennedy, looking around to the others.

All nodded silently, and Pete continued:

"It would be a good plan if we established a regular four hour watch and watch, and keep it up to the end of the voyage. If Kennedy and Long will take the starboard, Floyd and Jimmy can form

the port watch. I will help either one when needed, and promise I'll not take advantage of having the soft end of the job."

They all laughed, knowing he would work fully as hard, if not harder, than any other member of the crew. Pete looked at his timepiece, leaned over, and tapped the bell in front of him like this:

Tap-tap, tap-tap!

"Six o'clock in the dog watch," he announced. "At eight bells—eight o'clock, Cap—you call the port watch to relieve you. They will go off at midnight, and so alternate throughout the day until eight bells at four o'clock in the afternoon. Then will come the dog watches, which are only two hours, and split up the day so that each watch gets the eight hour night duty every other twenty-four hours."

Long Tom nodded his head in great satisfaction, and said respectfully:

"That's ship-shape, sir!"

A fresh southeast breeze had sprung up as they got clear of Active Pass and Pete set sail and steered west northwest through the darkness. It was a clear night and they could see in the distance the reflections of the electric lights of Vancouver, British Columbia, vibrating on the sky. The *Gracie* behaved well under canvas, and when Long Tom had belayed his sheets, the little vessel sprang ahead like a live thing. Long had cut and fitted the canvas with the skill of a nautical expert. The

spars were properly set and braced, and the standing and running rigging gave evidence of being just what was required. After a little the others saw Pete softly clap the palm of his hand on the rail against which he was leaning.

"It's all right!" he said with a smile of satisfaction. "She is going to sail like a witch, and be as easy to handle as a cat boat. I'm going to shut off steam now. But, Tom," he added, "I want you to bank the fire, and be ready to get a full head of steam any moment. We must keep everything prepared, in case of emergency. I understand, while there is little danger from wind in this inland Alaskan passage, that we are liable to get into currents where we may need power the worst way in a hurry."

"Aye, aye, sir!" said Long Tom.

"I've heard some of Seymour Narrows," drawled Joe Floyd. "I know'd a feller that went through. He said there was always a ripsnorting current there, and that at ebb and flood tide it was a regular whirlygig of a maelstrom. He claimed that at low tide the rocks stuck out of the water like the hairs on a cat struck by lightning."

"That's all sure as you're born, Joe!" returned Pete. "My sailing directions say just that, and the passage should be made when the tide is full. The United States steamer *Saranac* was wrecked here in '75, and a number of smaller vessels since. We will make Cape Mudge at the entrance of Discovery

Passage about daylight to-morrow morning. That's eighteen miles from the Narrows. This Passage is a mile wide, but it contracts to one-third of a mile in the Narrows. I reckon we'll get through. Good night. Keep her as she goes, Jimmy, and call me if the wind shifts, Tom." He went below.

When the "doctor," as the rest had dubbed Jimmy since his appointment as cook, announced that breakfast was ready the next morning, the *Gracie* had nearly reached the mouth of the Narrows. Pete had taken precaution to have a full head of steam on the engine. Long Tom took the wheel, and our young captain told Floyd to stand by in the wheel-house, in case the sailor needed assistance. Pete did not intend any accident should occur, if caution and care could prevent it.

Now the waters began to boil. In the narrow strait in front the flood tide, which they had caught, was racing through the channel in a mass of raging foam at the rate of ten knots an hour. Once fairly inside, the whirling cauldron caught the little vessel, and tossed it about like a chip on the edge of Niagara Falls. Fortunately, Long Tom was a clever helmsman, but the sudden and unexpected cross currents that caught the *Gracie's* bow as they neared the Ripple Rock in the middle and sent her in all sorts of unexpected directions, tested his skill to the utmost. He would suddenly whirl the wheel to hard-a-starboard, and the next moment madly

revolve the spokes until he had it almost as far a-port. It took all the strength the sturdy fellow possessed, and the muscles stood out on his bare arms. Joe took hold on the lee side of the wheel, and together they succeeded in maintaining control. Pete stood on the bow, and Kennedy amidships. Wherever the boy's alert eye saw a chance to con the boat through a less turbulent streak of water, he called his directions, and Kennedy passed the word promptly on to the steersman. It was an anxious time, and when the tide suddenly slacked before it began running in the opposite direction, they all felt their hearts beat more tranquilly. Before it began again they passed out of the Narrows into the broader and quieter waters beyond. They rounded Chatham Point sharply on the port hand, and laid a southwest course along Johnstone Strait.

"Cap," said Pete to Kennedy, as they stood together gazing at the lofty mountain walls, "that passage through the Narrows was about as good a test of the *Gracie* and her crew as we could have. The boat's a bully one, all right, and I hardly see how the ship's company could be improved upon."

"Right you are," agreed Kennedy. "It's a good thing to have an experience like that to shake us down in the beginning. I suppose it's about as tough as anything we will get, ain't it?"

"Yes," replied Pete. "As far as the Inland Passage goes. When we have to strike out of sight of land, and get in the Bering Sea, the Lord knows

what we'll meet with. There isn't any doubt it will take all our seamanship to put us through. I don't think we'll have any more trouble until we get in the Bering Sea. There we're liable to get nipped in the ice up to the middle of July. And, according to my calculations, it's important that we get into the Yukon River by that time. However, we'll do the best we can."

"And no one can do more," concluded Kennedy.

Now they settled down to regular sailing vessel routine. Pete was determined to economize fuel, and did not mind going leisurely during this portion of the voyage. They found good navigation to Ella Point, but on entering Broughton Strait the wind began to draw ahead. The tide had been in their favor, but as they opened up Alert Bay on Cormorant Island it turned against them. Pete saw a little cluster of houses on the shore of the bay, and came to an anchor in front of them. They went ashore and found there was a post office, and cannery in the village and dozens of grotesque totem poles. Pete left a letter for Grace, but without any expectation that it would be promptly forwarded.

As they proceeded along the north channel of Queen Charlotte Sound the next morning, Kennedy and Joe speculated as to the probability that Lee Sing would, if he had interpreted Blondin's sketch and notes, fit out an expedition with the same purpose they had in view. Joe thought if the China-

man took up the matter, his boat would be more or less apt to overtake the *Gracie* before she left Sitka.

"For," he said, "those Chinks are all sailor men, and they would follow us close. They will likely have a sailing vessel for I don't suppose they know much about steam. If they come at all they're apt to make the trip in one of them handy, little sealing schooners."

Pete was impressed with this idea.

"Yes," he said, "and if they do, it will be in our favor to have steam power when the trouble comes, as it's bound to sooner or later."

"I don't see," said Kennedy who was listening attentively, "why it wouldn't be the best plan when we get a little further north to ambush these Chinks, and shoot them up. It would save trouble in the end and they say—

"There's never a law of God or Man
Holds north of fifty-three."

Pete and Joe both laughed.

"You're some bloodthirsty!" commented Joe looking at the ex-revenue man rather admiringly.

"I'm not sure he's not right, for all that," Pete said.

"Well," concluded Kennedy as he started below. "I'm going to keep the arsenal in good shape anyhow. If those fellows heave in sight, I'll have plenty of lead to throw at them."

Towards the end of the afternoon the wind grew

almost to the proportions of a gale and hurried them along through the murk, for a foggy drizzle had now set in, faster than Pete cared to go, but later on he picked up Egg Island Light on his starboard bow. This told him where he was, and he shaped his course up Fitzhugh Sound. The wind was growing worse, and the young navigator thought it wise to put in at Whirlwind Bay about midnight. There is a little place supporting a fish cannery here, called Namu Harbor. The bay lies between Sunday and Clam Islands.

At daybreak the next morning they started across Fitzhugh Sound, and at Pointer Island Lighthouse, entered Lama Passage. The scenery was superb. Kennedy had travelled through Switzerland as a young man, but had never seen anything there to compare with it. Deer were frequently seen swimming from island to island, and Jimmy the cook, who was afraid of getting out of fresh meat, implored Captain Pete to capture one of the animals so as to replenish his rapidly diminishing supply. Shortly after a noble buck with branching horns came out on the shore of an island and started to swim to the opposite beach. The passage was about half a mile wide and when the animal was well out in the water, they pointed the bow of the *Gracie* so as to head it off. The buck turned and tried to reach the shore again, but was overtaken, and Tom Long cleverly dropped a running bowline over the antlers. As they hauled it over the side, Joe Floyd

drew the edge of his hunting knife across the quarry's throat. The whole proceeding keenly interested Dope, but he disdained to take any part in the capture, and viewed it dispassionately.

CHAPTER VII

THE CAPTAIN AND MATE OF THE DRAGON'S FANG

AS they sailed north the *Gracie's* route was continually more picturesque and interesting. It seemed an endless channel of labyrinthian passages winding through ribbons of water between defiles in the mountains which rose hundreds of feet high on both sides of them, and cast their shadows far out on the flood. Dense forests of fir covered the mountain sides, and were mirrored in the tranquil sheet of silver below. The passages were often so tortuous and irregular that they seemed a succession of lakes, and the boat would appear to be running headlong into a bluff when a sudden turn would reveal a continuation of the pathway, and open up another outlet to a still more charming environment.

On through half-mile-wide Lama Passage past Bella Bella Indian village and graveyard, beautiful and aptly named, into Seaforth Channel and out again to Millbank Sound. A strong southwest wind was blowing, and although it was fair for the *Gracie* it brought a heavy sea along with it, but she was a good heavy weather boat and only danced merrily along faster without shipping any water.

In the afternoon they passed Ivory Island Lighthouse and came to Finlayson Channel.

"Here's more trouble coming," said the boy captain to Kennedy and Floyd.

They had both become so confident of his ability to navigate the *Gracie* that his announcement gave them no uneasiness.

"I reckon you'll pull us through, as the rooster said when the fox caught him in the crack of the chicken house door." Floyd made this statement.

"What's the size and shape of it?" inquired the ex-revenue man with more curiosity than anxiety.

"Why," answered Pete, "here's the dark coming on, and there's the entrance to Hiekish Narrows three miles off. It's a dicky place to go through in broad day light."

"What's the matter with it?" asked Kennedy.

"Strong current, tide rips, and eddies, and Hewitt Rock right about the middle."

"How the deuce did you manage to find out all these things!" exclaimed the revenue man, with wonder in his face.

"Studied my sailing directions," replied Pete, carelessly.

"Everybody kin do little things like that," Floyd said with an amused twinkle to Kennedy, and the other answered indignantly:

"Oh, yes! it's all mighty easy! But it gets me."

Nevertheless they did pass the dangerous narrows as the last rays of the sun were fading out of

the sky, and worked up through Graham Reach into Swanson's Bay about midnight. They were tired with the strain of the day, and let go the anchor. There we will leave them for the night while the reader goes back to Victoria, where events are occurring that vitally concern the fortunes of the "Yellowbird Gold Mining Company."

The Chinese Colony of the capital of British Columbia was populous and busy. It did not compare in size with the celebrated one in San Francisco, but its characteristics were the same. On a smaller scale its inner life was that which exists wherever this Oriental race gathers together in municipal existence. In Victoria the premises occupied by them was confined to two city blocks. The police sternly kept them from over-running their boundaries, though they rarely desired to dwell outside the limits prescribed. To one unacquainted with their ways they seemed to herd together without distinction of class or worldly circumstance. Merchant and Coolie, rich man and poor one, vicious and reputable, all alike apparently dwelt in such proximity that an outsider could not draw the line which nevertheless divided them as immutably as caste keeps the Hindoos apart. Their dwellings consisted, so far as could be seen, of dingy, red brick buildings owned for the most part by prosperous English citizens who concerned themselves little as to what occurred on their premises while the ex-

ceedingly satisfactory rents were paid promptly on the first of every month.

On the inside of those uninviting walls an inner life throbbed that was as different from anything that western civilization knows, as darkness from light. These bloused, pig-tailed pagans with their demure, sallow faces walked the streets, and even as household servants were in daily intimate association with the whites of the city, but they were as little comprehended, and their lives less open to the understanding of the ruling race than are the Zulus in Africa. After all, the difference is racial, and the West and the East are so essentially distinct in character, temperament, and physical and mental habit that it is little surprising they differ in their standards of morals.

Did the reader ever see a large rabbit burrow, or a prairie dog town? Well, the inside of these two brick blocks of the Victoria Chinatown could, not inaptly, be compared to one of them. In the first place the Orientals had at their own expense built on the houses they inhabited—infested, I was about to say—in the rear. The space ordinarily reserved as yard or garden in civilized cities was completely covered over and built up. In many cases the property owners did not know of these improvements(?) on their domain, for the celestials paid their rent promptly, and in their leases invariably assumed the responsibility of keeping the property in repair, so there was no necessity, and in fact,

hardly an excuse, for a visit from the owner. He received his rent—it was brought to him; he did not even have to go for it—month after month and year after year, and why should he investigate so gratifying a condition of affairs. For such reasons the outside world left Chinatown at peace.

On the evening of the first of May Lee Sing sat behind the counter of his tea store smoking a long-stemmed pipe. He put it down, and arose. Giving some directions in his native tongue to the sleek, black-haired, yellow-faced clerk who sat near, he passed into the hall at the back. Half way down he turned, and faced what was apparently the entrance to a dumb waiter shaft. He threw open the door, and touched a spring which loosened a trap that fell across the opening to the depths beneath. Then he entered, and closed the hall door behind him. On a little shelf on the wall of the shaft—or closet, as it became when the trap door was closed—was a small lamp, and he lighted the wick. Then he inserted a key in an almost imperceptible hole in the opposite wall. There was a faint click, a door opened inwards, and he stepped forward into the secret passage disclosed by his light.

The ex-pirate followed it past a number of doors until he had gone a hundred feet or more, and came to a stairway leading below. He continued his way far beneath the foundations of the building, and apparently to the other side of the block marking the boundary of the colony. Then he ascended another

set of steps, the stairway seemingly a secret passage against the wall of the building, until he reached a large room at the top of the house.

This apartment was brilliantly lighted, but the outside iron shutters were drawn, and heavy curtains screened the light so that not the faintest ray penetrated to the outer world. The room was furnished with Oriental luxury. Heavy and costly silk hangings draped the walls, and divans were arranged in groups on the gorgeous rugs that covered the floor. There were no chairs but beside each divan was a low table, and it was evident the place was an assembly or club room.

Lee Sing reclined on one of the couches, and touched a gong that hung near with his pointed, yellow finger.

A door opened in the further end of the room, and a man came toward Lee Sing. The new comer was of the coolie type, but he merits a few words of description in as much as he will reappear in these pages. His features were grotesquely Mongolian. His eyes slanted so that they were almost perpendicularly set in his face. The nose was short and broad, the mouth wolfish, and the chin beneath long and heavy, and underhung like that of a fighting bull-dog. His low forehead was shaved back to the middle of the head, and his coarse black hair gathered in a carefully-braided queue so long that it fell below his waist. Massive gold rings hung in the torn lobes of his ears, and completed his barbaric

aspect. This gargoyle of a head was fitted on a pair of massive shoulders. His hairy, muscular, bare arms, and burly torso indicated that he possessed herculean strength. To complete the figure he had the short bandy legs of a dwarf.

"Wong," said Lee Sing, (I am translating the Chinese dialect in which Lee Sing spoke into English for the benefit of the reader) "I hear that made-over tug that lay in the Arm is no longer there. Did Scar-faced Jake and Todd offer to ship on her?"

"They did, Highness," answered Wong, in a deep, unctuous voice that possessed a certain grating quality which made it so resonant that it carried like the clang of steel on steel. "They reported the vessel had taken out papers to go to Alaska; and the Master's name was Peter Graignic. Graignic considered their application to enroll in the ship's company, and told them to come again on the fourth, three days from now."

The pirate captain nodded, and continued to interrogate Wong with inquiring eyes:

"Yes, Highness," he responded to the insistent gaze, "there is more. Kennedy, the friend of French Blondin was in the company, for Jake saw him with Graignic. There were two others. A big man—a sailor I think—and a little one—a Scotchman, who formerly worked with Kennedy."

"It is good," said Lee Sing. After a moment's thought he continued: "It is certain Kennedy was



“THE GOLD IS THERE! HIGHNESS”

told by the Frenchman that he had found the gold in Alaska, and they have arranged to go to the place and dig the rest of it. Luckily the Frenchman entered the sea of oblivion that night, and we have the chart of his discovery, and the gold he had already taken from the mine."

From the fold of his voluminous garment he produced a thin, leather-covered blank book. He opened it and after turning several pages placed the long nail of his little finger upon a rude map.

"Blondin was a poor draftsman," he mused, half to himself. "This long, heavy line is undoubtedly a river, and as it enters the Bering Sea near the point he has marked as St. M., it must be the father of waters—the great Yukon River of which I heard in Siberia."

Wong was peering over his captain's shoulder, and following the finger nail as it traced the course of the river. His mouth opened eagerly, and disclosed the serrated, yellow fangs of teeth.

"The gold is there! Highness," he eagerly exclaimed. "You recollect nuggets and dust were brought to us by the natives in Siberia."

"No doubt, Wong," responded Lee Sing. "No doubt you are right. I've long believed gold is to be found in those bleak territories but"—and he displayed his teeth in a hyena smile—"we have always been able to acquire the precious metal through easier methods than by digging for it like a son of the soil."

"Highness," said Wong. "These men are going to find the spot the Frenchman knew, and dig the gold. Let us take a boat, and start in our old way. We have you and me, and Chow and Ah Tan of the old crew. It is not enough, but perhaps we can find others among our people here, or take with us Scar-faced Jake and Todd. The barbarians may serve our purposes during the voyage, and at the end there are ways to dispose of them."

A fiendish smile played on his lips, and was reflected in the features of his former captain.

"I am tempted," said Lee Sing. "This life in a house tires my bones. I long to walk the reeling deck of my ship while the briny wind blows in my face. There seems nothing more to do in Victoria. We only eat, and drink, and grow fat. The strong and clever Americans have put an end to our smuggling game, and—in fact, Wong, you're right, and we'll get to sea again!"

Wong leaped to his feet with a yell of exultation that rang through the room like a howl of a wild beast. Lee Sing smiled indulgently as he raised his hand to moderate the transport of his old follower.

"Hold yourself in, Old One!" he said, "you're not out of sight of land yet." Then with a change of manner to the stern authority of the pirate chief, he continued: "Notify Chow and Ah Tan, and look out for a craft that will suit. I think a sealing schooner will do. Pick out the best that is moored

in the stream. When we are ready we will take her in the night, throw the ship-keeper overboard, and hurrah! for the broad ocean and a life in the open."

"What about Jake and Todd?" asked Wong.

"Keep them in play. Bring of the best, and we will drink to the success of our voyage, Old Wong."

The man grinned with joy as he shuffled away on his errand. For many years these two men had been associated in crime. Both were desperate outlaws. Lee Sing was the keener spirit, and possessed acuteness of intellect that made him the leader in their forays. Wong was his tool and a more serviceable one could not have been fitted to his hand. Ever since their first association he had been executive officer of his various ships, and as far as seamanship and daring went his superior could not be found. Imagine this pair of capable and unscrupulous villains in the midst of a high civilization like that of the capital of British Columbia, cloaked by the entire ignorance of the western world of their criminal propensities. The two men were infernal machines loaded to the muzzle with deadly possibilities.

Wong returned with a small, bulbous flask of green glass and two tiny goblets. He carefully extracted a wad of cotton from the mouth of the flagon, and poured off the half inch of oil which had screened the precious liqueur from the ravages of the atmosphere. Then with steady hand he filled the

drinking vessels to the brim. As the rich, oily liquid bubbled forth it filled the air with its spicy fragrance. They drank it slowly, and with the gusto of connoisseurs. Wong filled the glasses again until the flask was empty. The pirates' eyes had grown brighter, and their dull cheeks were flushed as they continued the conversation.

Wong, the self-indulgent old buccaneer, would have brought forth a second flask, but Lee Sing suddenly shook off the languor produced by the powerful spirit, and arose to his feet.

"Wong," he said, "no more, old thief! We will have many a carouse in the future, but here we must restrain ourselves. And now to work at once! No time is to be lost. Search among your friends, old warrior, and see if you can enlist three worthy recruits as members of the crew of the '*Dragon's Fang*.'"

Wong stiffened in elation as he heard once more the name of the junk in which they had swept the coast of China until it was a terror to all who dwelt along the sea coast.

Lee Sing again entered the alley way. He followed one of the other byways of this labyrinth traversing the whole block, and as commonly used and known to inhabitants of the colony as the street in front. Two men, coolies of the lower class, guarded the portal of an inner room before which he paused. They saluted the pirate chief, and threw the door wide for him to pass.

Within was a gambling den. The room was large and bare, and reeked with the fumes of opium. Two fan-tan tables at the upper end were surrounded by excited players reaching over one another's shoulders four or five deep. Lee Sing's appearance was evidently not unusual, for he nodded here and there as he made his way to a table where higher play was going on.

At this table only four or five men, whose attire betokened them to belong to the wealthier class, were playing. Lee Sing took a seat among them.

When he arose an hour later he swept the mass of gold he had won into his pocket, and re-entered the alley way. This time he came out into a temple devoted to the homage of some heathen god. Shaven-headed priests knelt before the inner shrine, and one came out to the belated worshiper, and presented him a wicker-work tray filled with small pieces of red paper printed with Chinese lettering in black and gold. Lee Sing took some of the squares, and gave a handful of gold to the priest. The latter passed him a lighted stick of incense, and led him to the inside rail. He shortly emerged, and again entered the alley. This time his goal was an opium den of the higher class, one of several that existed in this colony. It was sumptuously furnished, and lighted by braziers in which the glowing charcoal was used for the cooking of the opium pills. Ornate bunks, one above the other, lined the walls of the various apartments, for this resort had

half a dozen rooms *en suite*. Most of the bunks were occupied by devotees of the drug, it being after midnight, and business was in full swing. Quick-footed, alert Celestials darted from customer to customer lighting the pipe, and handing them the pill of opium.

Sad to relate, not only Chinese but white people were among the patrons of this den. Well dressed men from the outer world whose friends would have been horrified to know they possessed this pernicious habit, reclined on the pillows, and inhaled the deadly drug into their lungs. It was here Lee Sing wound up his evening.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GRACIE ARRIVES AT SITKA, AND WHAT SHE FOUND THERE

ON the morning of the second of June the *Gracie* lay at Swanson's Bay enveloped in a fog so thick that Floyd declared he could eat it. Pete had studied up the subject, and was explaining to his less well-informed companions:

"You see," he said. "The Kuro Siwo is a current in the Pacific Ocean like the gulf stream of the Atlantic. It is really a warm river—burrowing through the colder water of the sea—that runs along the whole Pacific coast."

"Is that a Siwash name?" asked Kennedy.

"No," replied Pete with a smile. "Kuro Siwo is Japanese for Black Stream. This current modifies the climate of the whole Pacific coast, and keeps the mountain slopes green and the air balmy. The cold atmosphere from the land striking the hot water of this current makes these banks of vapor along the shores. It is unfortunate for navigators, but it preserves this country from the Arctic inclemency which prevails north of Sitka, for at that point the benevolent Black Stream trends away from the coast of Alaska."

The balance of the day the *Gracie* lay gently tossing in the fog. After dinner Joe Floyd rigged up a fishing line, and tried his luck. He used a heavy sinker, and had scarcely allowed his bait to get ten feet below the surface of the water than the hook was suddenly seized. He struck, and started to haul in his victim. It was all he could do. The others gathered around as he lifted a magnificent black cod over the rail, and dropped it flapping at their feet. This started them all overhauling their fishing tackle, and they got to work.

Captain Pete, who seemed to the rest to be a walking encyclopedia, knew a good deal about the finny inhabitants of these northern waters. He told them that salmon were perhaps more numerous here than anywhere in the known waters of the globe. Factories for canning this important food fish were being established, and Pete predicted that in the future the fisheries of Alaska would occupy a more important place in the world's commerce than those of Norway, or the Hebrides and the North Atlantic. He said halibut, herring, cod, rock cod, and a hundred other species of fish abounded here in such quantity there seemed no end of them. These comparatively small fish were not all. Whales, of all kinds from the humpback to the great 'right' whale; killers, grampuses, porpoises, seals, including the priceless fur-clothed one, sea otters and walruses, swarmed in the landlocked waters of the Alaskan archipelago.

Towards evening a slight breeze sprang up, and the blankets of fog began to lift, or roll in and mass against the shore. They got their anchor aboard and spread their canvas. As the *Gracie* got under way Tom reported that a small craft was in sight astern, and bowling along with the increasing breeze as if it might overtake them.

Captain Pete examined the sail in the distance with interest:

"It's a small schooner!" he announced to Kennedy and Joe. In a moment he added: "She's a smart sailor, and is well handled. They have spread every rag they can, and don't intend to lose any time in getting there."

"Where?" asked Kennedy and Joe, simultaneously.

"Sitka, the first stage to the Yukon River."

The words dropped slowly from Pete's mouth, and the revenue man and rancher looked at each other, and him significantly.

"Do you suppose—" started Kennedy.

"I wonder whether—" began Floyd.

Pete took his binoculars from his eyes to wipe a blur from the glass, and turned to the others:

"I am going to assume that every craft I see is the one Lee Sing and his crew of Chinamen are following us in. We are only four days out of Victoria and have lain at anchor two nights. They must have started the day after and laid about the same course, but they banged right through without

stopping. They know we're ahead of them, and are trying to catch up."

"I don't see what they could do if they overtook us," remarked Kennedy uneasily.

"They want to get to that placer ground first," replied Pete. "And the lawless chaps might take it into their heads to put us out of the way to prevent us from forestalling them."

"You're taking it mighty serious," said Joe Floyd. "But I reckon it is the best way. If that fellow calculates to do any piratin' on us though, I reckon he'll have his hands full."

"The arsenal's in good shape!" volunteered Kennedy. "I wish we'd had sense enough to mount a Gatling gun on the *Gracie*."

Pete seemed rather impressed by this suggestion, but he was again examining the craft behind them. He was making his way through the tortuous complexities of Fraser and McKay Reaches and before long he was certain the other boat was out-sailing the *Gracie*, although the latter now had the full force of the wind the other brought up with her. He started his engine to work, and boomed ahead into Grenville Channel. This body of water is forty-five miles long, and from a half, to one mile wide. Serpent's Waterfall on the west shore is one of the most striking sights of the inside trip. They gazed at it in wonder and admiration. A large stream zigzags from waterfall to waterfall down from the top of a mountain five thousand feet

high. The roar and clash of the turbulent stream is borne far out on the smooth waters of the Channel.

The youthful commander took a last glance at the schooner as it was shut out of sight by a headland, and said, snapping his binoculars together:

"I was going to lie over to-night at Stewart's Anchorage near the end of this channel, but I guess I'll keep right on past Watson's Point Light. The engine isn't working just right, and I'm afraid we're in for trouble. I'd like to get to Dixon's Entrance, that's about fifty miles, before it comes on."

Kennedy and Joe nodded as if they thought he was right, but after all it was evident they considered it up to him to shoulder the responsibility of deciding their course. What worried the young commander more than anything else was his engine. Something was wrong, or becoming wrong with it, and he could not locate the trouble. He passed Lawyer's Island Lighthouse on Arthur Passage in the afternoon and worked on, the *Gracie's* engine becoming more refractory all the time, through Malacca Passage keeping a northwest course. To add to his perplexities the wind, which had been on their beam, now hauled ahead and blew strongly from the north, northeast. This forced him to depend entirely on steam if he headed up to his course.

At dark the wind had increased to a gale which tossed the little boat around in so lively a way that it made the gold hunters uncomfortable for the first

time since leaving Victoria. Captain Pete looked rather serious as he paced the deck forward. He was hardly making headway, and the only comforting reflection with which he could cheer his mind was that the pursuing schooner had been dropped out of sight behind for some hours. As he turned over the *Gracie's* position in his mind, and tried to decide on the best course to pursue, a violent snort of escaping steam came from the engine room accompanied by a wrenching clatter.

He leaped through the clouds of scalding vapor to the boiler, and shut off the power. By the time the others had gathered around—which they did in a hurry, with the exception of Tom Long who stuck to the wheel—he discovered that his cylinder head had blown out, and that the vessel was momentarily helpless as far as the engine was concerned. He came on deck again, and stood for a moment, the rest watching him in silence ready to execute his commands. He cast a rapid eye to the windward, and stepped into the wheel house to consult his chart.

“Tom,” he said to Long. “The cylinder head has blown out. I think I can tinker it up when I have time, but now we’re fighting a headwind, and it is useless to bother with it for the present. I am going to bear away to the westerly which will make a fair wind of it, and try and make Cape Muzon on the south end of Dale Island. Can we do it?”

“How far is it, sir?” inquired Tom.

"Only seventy-five or eighty miles."

"Certainly, sir!" he answered confidently. "She'll do it easy. And I think we'll find smoother water if the wind holds, as we'll draw in under the land."

"All right!" said the young navigator, confirmed in his own opinion. "Let Jimmy take the wheel, and get the canvas on her."

All hands took part in setting sail under Pete's and Long Tom's directions, and the *Gracie* was soon bowling along at six or seven knots an hour. The little tug made very good weather of it, and did not dance so much as when she was under steam. The wind continued steady in the northeast as they plunged through the darkness.

Pete would not turn in. He left Long in charge of the deck as soon as the motion of the vessel became less pronounced, and shut himself in the engine room. He was only an amateur machinist, but he knew the function of every valve and bolt on the engine. He found that his problem was by no means an easy one, but he studied over it until he finally thought he could replace the head that had blown off and secure it so firmly that it would answer all ordinary purposes, and at any rate last until he could get hold of a regular machinist. Having reached this conclusion, he turned in, and slept like one of the Seven Sleepers, for he was completely tired out.

When Captain Pete came on deck the next morn-

ing it was seven o'clock. His exhaustion had made him sleep longer than he intended and the others, knowing how much he needed the rest, would not awaken him. Cape Muzon was behind them, the wind had diminished, and the *Gracie* was going through the smooth water like a duck in a mill pond. Jimmy brought him a thick, juicy, venison steak from the deer they had lassoed two days before, and he made a hearty breakfast. As soon as his hunger was satisfied, he looked up his position on the chart and held a consultation with Tom Long. He was going below to wrestle with the problem of that cylinder head, and he wished to be uninterrupted. He directed Long to haul up on a north, northwest course after passing Forrester and Lowrie Islands, and bear away for the sixty mile run to Coronation Island.

Pete started to work at his engine. Unfortunately he could not find any bolts of the size he wanted to use in securing the iron plate in its position again, but he managed by the strenuous use of files, and die cutters to finally manufacture what would serve his purpose in default of better. After several hours labor he finally completed his task, and although he decided that it would be just as well not to carry a very heavy head of steam, he was satisfied his job would withstand ordinary pressure.

As he was washing the grime from his hands, Tom Long called him on deck. The *Gracie* was crossing the mouth of Christian Sound, having

passed Coronation. The wind had hauled to the north and was blowing half a gale. It was only about twenty-five miles to Cape Ommaney on the south end of Baranoff, and Pete decided to keep ahead under canvas, although he was now prepared to get steam up if it proved necessary. He had not a large reserve of coal and although he was now less than a hundred miles from Sitka, he knew that in the labyrinthian maze of islands, reefs, and channels on the south side of Sitka Sound, he was liable to need every pound.

Nevertheless Pete felt pretty happy, for the first stage of his journey to the Yukon was almost reached. It was not until he passed Whale Bay (thirty-five miles from Cape Ommaney) that he needed to start the engine, and he worked through until he sighted the truncated top of Mt. Edgecombe. He got this to bear northwest, half north on the starboard bow. When Biorka Island was bearing northeast, he pointed the *Gracie's* head north by east. Ten miles of this brought him to mid channel between Vitskari and Kulichkof Rocks. Then he steered northeast with the buoys on Simpson and Tsaritsa Rocks on the port bow, hauled westward around the Twins and headed for Sitka wharf.

"As pretty a course as I ever see sailed by the British Hadmiral!" said Long Tom.

A little schooner lay moored to the wharf in front of them.

"By the Hood of the Cobra!" exclaimed Kennedy. "It's the one we saw, and she got ahead of us in the night."

Pete nodded, and Joe Floyd who was with the other two, said:

"Say, Cap! bring the *Gracie* up close to that chap. I wouldn't mind seeing some of the crew."

Pete signaled to Long Tom, who was at the wheel, to keep her off, and five minutes afterwards they tied within a hundred feet of where the stranger was swinging.

It must be remembered that Long Tom the sailor, and Jimmy the Scotch cook, knew nothing of the ultimate intention of the voyage, or the hazards they were liable to encounter in its prosecution. The strange craft did not interest them to the same extent as the others, and they went uninterestedly about their duties.

After a closer look at the schooner's deck our three adventurers unconsciously drew together at the rail:

"You see?" breathed Pete. "Those two deck hands are Chinamen!"

The other two nodded silently. A third man came out of the little scuttle on the flush deck. He was evidently in authority, for he gave an order to one of the sailors. In a moment a fourth Chinaman emerged from the hold. Floyd started, and gazed intently. The others saw something of interest was afoot, and looked at him inquiringly.

The officer could be plainly seen, and this is what he looked like. "His features were grotesquely Mongolian. His eyes slanted so they were almost perpendicularly set in his face. The nose was short and broad; the mouth wolfish, and the chin beneath long and heavy, and underhung like that of a fighting bull dog. . . . Massive gold rings in the torn lobes of his ears completed his barbaric aspect. This gargoyle of a head was fitted on a pair of massive shoulders . . . and burly torso indicated herculean strength. . . . He had the short bandy legs of a dwarf."

It was not this uninviting specimen of humanity however, that had attracted Floyd's attention, and seemingly petrified him with astonishment. It was the man who had joined the two members of the crew forward. He was a strongly-built coolie, and if there was anything noticeable about him it was that he looked less objectionable than the rest. The distance between the vessels was so small conversation was audible from one to the other. In a moment "Bandylegs" spoke again, and this time as the third sailor started in answer to the command Floyd distinguished the name of Ah Fat.

"That settles it!" said he softly to his companions. "I don't know whether I'm a foot or a horse-back!"

Pete and Kennedy had by this time caught on to the new development.

"Is that your friend for sure?" inquired Kennedy with something like a sneer in his voice.

Joe and Pete both recognized the suggestion implied by Kennedy, but neither of them were so ready to interpret Ah Fat's presence on board the other craft as an evidence of treachery. Pete covertly watched the expression of the giant rancher's face. Joe was undoubtedly thunderstruck at the appearance of his friend in the pirate crew, but he was a man of rare good judgment, and little inclined to question a conclusion he had once definitely arrived at. He was thinking deeply. In fact during that moment he went over the whole time of his acquaintance—an interval of ten or twelve years—with Ah Fat, and he could not recall one instance where his Celestial friend's faith and loyalty were to be questioned. He lifted his head, and looked Pete squarely into the eyes:

"It's Ah Fat, sure enough!" he affirmed, "and what he's doing there I can't imagine, but by the Great Horn Spoon!"—the rancher never used this imprecation save in moments of excitement—"he ain't among them for nothing wrong. And he's too smart not to know the crowd, and what they're after. *Captain Pete, we've got a friend in the enemy's camp!*"

Kennedy looked discontented and doubtful, but Pete had strong reliance in the sagacity of Floyd, and was inclined to agree with the rancher's conclusion.

"Well," he said. "Time will tell. It may prove a mighty handy thing if what you surmise is true. At any rate we'll act on that assumption until we find out to the contrary."

Floyd and Pete shortly went ashore. It was thought advisable one of the three should remain aboard the *Gracie* during their proximity to the strange craft. As they passed the schooner's stern, Joe pointed with his finger. Pete looked up, and read—

"The *Dragon's Fang*."

The name was in English lettering, but surrounded by a crimson Chinese scroll of which they did not know the significance. Pete's sharp eyes detected that the name was inscribed on a board attached to the outer skin of the sealing schooner instead of being in raised letters on the vessel itself, as was customary. Possibly the board covered some former name inscribed beneath.

CHAPTER IX

AN INVITATION TO AN ORIENTAL DINNER—WONG AND DOPE GET MIXED

SLEEPY Sitka! Though pre-occupied with the problem presented to them by the *Dragon's Fang* the more intelligent of our little company of adventurers are beginning to realize that their quest has brought them to a remarkable spot. Sitka has been compared with Naples, but those who have seen both claim the latter is inferior in all that goes to make up an ideal human dwelling place. The little, old, Russian settlement hardly disturbed by American innovation, is indeed sleepy, but the frame of the picture is magnificent, stupendous, majestic, tremendous. The city and bay lie in front of a battlement of snow-clad volcanic peaks rearing heads stained with broad crimson ridges of hardened lava far into the blue sky. The town occupies the curve of a crescent, and the placid bay in front is sprinkled with dots of islands crowned with rough-haired firs casting their shadows on the water.

Pete and Joe Floyd and Kennedy saw all this, and absorbed it. Long Tom and Jimmy cast a careless glance about, and became interested in the Indians that thronged the dock, and the log castle

that crowned the height at the back. Captain Pete also had his eye on this castle, and determined to see it close at hand before the *Gracie* continued her voyage. He knew that in this noble, barbaric structure would be found interesting traces of the earliest Russian civilization in America.

Events quickly happened, however, which drove admiration of the scenery and intention of historical research out of Pete's mind. Shortly after their return on board, the *Gracie* adventurers saw Captain Lee Sing standing, an imposing figure in his flowing Oriental garb, on the quarter deck of the *Dragon's Fang*. He waved his hand in a sweeping, courteous gesture to Pete, and as the latter responded, Lee Sing stepped on the string-piece of the wharf, and walked down abreast of the converted tug. His English was singularly pure for an Oriental.

"You've a smart craft, sir. I am Captain Lee Sing out of Victoria, and bound north to the Siberian shore for trade and sealing."

In his secret mind Pete reflected it was possibly lucky for the pirate there was no telegraphic communication between Victoria and Sitka. He was certain Lee Sing had stolen the *Dragon's Fang*. He showed no trace of his thought, but answered with an impassive face:

"Glad to meet you, Captain, this is the *Gracie*, and I am Captain Gaignic. Also bound on a trading voyage."

Pete met him in the waist as he stepped aboard, and they shook hands with bluff cordiality which rather grated on Kennedy. Dope, who was sitting beside Joe Floyd—the mastiff had adopted the rancher as second best, and gave him all the time he could spare from his master—sniffed uneasily. Then he whimpered, and padded over to his master and Lee Sing. Joe looked on with an interested smile in his keen blue eyes. Pete said carelessly to the other:

“My dog, Captain,” as if introducing him.

He was careful, however, not to address Dope, for he did not wish to confuse the intelligent animal’s instinct. The Chinaman gazed at the mastiff with interest, and stood apparently at ease as the great dog began to make certain investigations required by the occasion. He gravely sniffed the stranger’s heel and ran his investigating nose up the Celestial leg to the knee. Then he turned to his master. Rearing to his full height he placed his paws on Pete’s shoulders. While in this position he repeated the uneasy whimper he had given at first, and followed it with an unmistakable menacing growl.

Pete and Floyd understood the dog as plainly as if he had spoken his suspicions into their ears. The Chinaman possibly did not comprehend that Dope was warning his master of intangible treachery in the air, and wondering why he should be permitted to condone unworthiness in the person of the

strangely-apparelled intruder. Pete smiled when he caught Joe's eye, and patted the dog's head as he pushed him aside.

Kennedy and Floyd were presented to the visitor as partners in the trading venture, and the Chinaman promptly said:

"I know Captain Kennedy, and if I'm not mistaken he knows me." He laughed and continued: "You nearly caught me smuggling once or twice, Captain Kennedy, but that's a vice our nation cannot refrain from. Now that you are out the customs service, and we meet on the open sea, I will acknowledge that my tea business in Victoria was only a cloak for the contraband trade I carried on. Smuggling is not considered wrong, or unworthy by my race. In my younger days I was a sailor, and captain of a junk at home. I'm glad to be on the salt water again instead of mewed up in a store. I can breathe more freely."

His manner was so free from offense that, if it had not been for their actual knowledge of the criminal career and evil intentions of the man before them, they would have been inclined to accept him for what he pretended to be. Dope, however, continued to regard him from Floyd's side, where he had retreated, with a hostile eye. In the interview that followed, the Chinaman stated that he and his mate Wong, whom he pointed out on the deck of the *Dragon's Fang*, had many years before made a trip to Siberian Russia, and been impressed

with the lucrative possibility of the fur trade with the nomad natives of the northern tribes. Lee Sing was a diplomat of no mean ability, and told his story with cordial plausibility that made it difficult for the others not to accept him for what he presented himself. He invited our three friends to join him the next day at dinner, promising to give them an Oriental meal. Pete accepted for himself, and his friends with some misgiving.

After their visitor had returned to the *Dragon's Fang* our three adventurers regarded one another with doubtful faces. Lee Sing had left them in a different frame of mind from the one in which he found them. Kennedy was the first to speak:

"By the Mammoth's Tusk!" he burst out, "If I didn't almost know that Chinaman's hands are red with Blondin's blood I'd think he was a decent chap. He's different from the oily, Celestial tea dealer of Victoria, as chalk is from cheese."

"He's a remarkable man," mused Pete. "And I find it difficult to believe he has not some good in him at the bottom. Perhaps that repulsive-looking, bandy-legged, reprobate of a mate of his is the instigator of this trip, and the assassin of the Frenchman."

Joe Floyd shook his head:

"I stand by Dope! The smooth Chinese pirate can't fool us, old boy, can he?"

He pulled the dog's silken ear, and Dope re-

sponded with a quick lick of his red tongue on the rough, caressing hand.

"Well, Joe," acknowledged Pete, "I guess you have got the best of it. At any rate, I'd rather bank on the dog's instinct than I would on our judgment."

"Yes," agreed Kennedy, "The dog has got him sized up for bad medicine. Let's play this game mighty carefully."

"Sure thing," agreed the other two, but Joe added:

"I wish I could have a talk with Ah Fat without those other Chinks getting on. That's one thing I don't believe foxy Mr. Lee Sing knows about—that Ah Fat is my old side-partner. It's Chinaman against Oriental here, and if Ah Fat joined the *Dragon's Fang* to help me out—as I am willing to bet he did—you're apt to see a mighty pretty lineup between two of a kind. Ah Fat ain't no slouch when it comes to a show down, and don't you forget it."

Pete and Floyd paid a visit to the Baranoff castle in the afternoon, Kennedy electing to remain on board to watch their suspicious neighbors. It is a heavy, square building crowning the rocky headland rising from the water. The building is a hundred and forty feet long by seventy wide, and framed of huge cedar logs riveted to the rock itself by copper bolts. From the earliest Russian settle-

ment in the seventeenth century, it has been the habitation of the governors of the province. They were usually chosen from the nobility, and when they left the European capital of their country they brought their luxurious habits and belongings with them. The great drawing room had been lined with mirrors, and the interior appointments replete with Muscovite splendor. At the time our friends made their visit the castle was in perfect condition so far as its solid frame was concerned, but it had been despoiled of every portable thing. The great lantern, even, that used to light the mariner from the castle tower, was gone, and the Hall of State, where the governors received and entertained their visitors, was dismantled, and resembled a gloomy garret.

When they were coming up the wharf on their return, Dope stalked behind as usual, with his nose in the crook of his master's knee. Wong, of the *Dragon's Fang*, happened to be going ashore, and met them. As they came abreast of each other, Pete and Joe, who had their eyes fixed on the pirate's face, suddenly saw its expression change into one of agony. His hand darted to his breast, and reappeared armed with a long, curved knife. At the same instant Pete realized that Dope had deserted his post, and held the calf of the Chinaman's leg between his teeth. Like a flash the weapon descended in a gleaming side blow. Simultaneously, Floyd fell back a pace behind Pete,

and struck Wong with all the force of his shoulder behind his huge fist. The unexpected blow caught the mate on the side of his head, and bowled him over like a nine-pin. The knife stuck point up in the plank alongside of Dope. Floyd pulled the quivering blade from the wood, and drawled to Pete, as he cautiously ran his finger along the edge:

"It's a nice little tooth-pick, Captain Pete. I reckon it would have made Dope sick if I hadn't landed first."

Pete was holding the dog by the heavy collar. Dope was insane with rage, and with bared teeth, snarled fiercely in his efforts to reach Wong. Joe's blow had been given with a heartiness that stunned the man for a moment, but he was a sturdy villain, and quickly leaped to his feet. His under-hung jaw was set, and his lips drawn back over his teeth in a menace that equalled Dope's in fury. For a second, as he confronted them, all the insane and unrestrained ferocity of his race and type showed in his face.

Then a cheerful voice broke in from behind them, and his features once more assumed the sullen impassiveness that ordinarily characterised them.

"What's this? Your dog don't seem to like my mate!" broke in Lee Sing, who had seen the incident from the deck of the *Dragon's Fang*, and arrived on the scene with a celerity of which he would not have been thought capable.

"It was an accident," explained Pete, rather lamely.

Floyd was still admiring the "tooth-pick," and he added tersely:

"It might have been worse."

Lee Sing spoke imperatively to Wong in the Chinese tongue. The latter answered humbly, and apparently in extenuation. Then the pirate captain turned to our friends:

"He says the dog seized him without provocation, and before he thought he lunged at him with the knife."

Lee Sing's tone and manner were serene. It was apparent he did not intend to have any fracas between the ship's companies at this time, whatever might be his intentions in the future.

Pete sharply ordered the mastiff onto the *Gracie*, and he obeyed with unusual reluctance. The pirate's leg was gashed so that blood flowed freely, but serious injury had been averted by the quickness with which Pete pulled the dog back. As they examined the wound, Floyd stood on the string piece of the dock. When he stepped down, the knife, apparently by accident, fell from his hand. It struck the edge of the timber and bounded, a glittering crescent, into twenty feet of water. The incident made Wong scowl.

When the mate had gone on about his business, Pete apologised for the dog's indiscretion, freely acknowledging the attack had been unwarranted.

He drew a gold piece from his pocket, and told Lee Sing to give it to the victim. He said he would not permit the mastiff to come ashore in future. His overtures were received in the spirit in which they were made, and the two parted amicably, Lee Sing again reminding him of the engagement to dine on the *Dragon's Fang*.

Kennedy witnessed the adventure from the after deck of the *Gracie*, but with unusual self-restraint he had foreborne to hasten to the scene of the encounter. His first words when they came aboard were to Joe Floyd.

"Partner," he said, "you must have learned how to hit from a pile-driver. That Chinaman went over like a jack rabbit with a charge of number six in it."

"I was in a hurry," remarked Joe extenuatingly. "I didn't want to hurt the cuss, but if I hadn't got the lick in lively, he'd spitted Dope on that 'ere kreese of his."

"It was an ugly-looking tool," conceded Kennedy. "And those Chinamen know how to use that kind of a weapon."

"Yes," rejoined Joe reminiscently. "I've seen them make sausage meat of one another in the diggings in California."

"It's unfortunate," said Pete. "I never expected old Dope to make such a break, and it's the first time he ever did in his life."

"He didn't make no mistake," Joe affirmed.

"Perhaps not," resumed Pete. "But we seem to be the aggressors. From all I've heard of the Oriental character, this offense will never be forgiven, and I guess they'll try and make Dope's friends, as well as Dope himself, pay for the attack."

"Yes," concluded Kennedy. "The worst of it is, these fellows smile, and smile, and you never know when they are going to bite until they get their teeth in you."

Jimmy and Long Tom went ashore that night to take a look at the Rancherie, which interested them more than anything else about Sitka. It was a double row of square houses on the water front at the end of the town, and corresponded in character with the Five Points district of New York City in the days before Jake Reis started his philanthropic crusade. They did not come aboard until after eleven o'clock, and it was evident the little Scotchman had several drinks of *hoochinoo* in him. Tom, with greater self restraint, or a larger sense of responsibility, was perfectly sober. The three superiors had remained on deck in the moist twilight. Jimmy, with rather devious steps, at once sought his bunk. Long Tom joined the others.

"Captain," he said to Pete, "there's some funny business about this *Dragon's Fang* outfit. Ever since we first saw her she has had a crew of Chinamen, but to-night two of those deck hands were down at the Rancherie, and who do you suppose was with them?"

He answered his own question, as the others stared at him interrogatively:

"Do you remember those two fellows that wanted to ship with us when we were laying in the Arm?"

"Scar-face, and his mate?" asked Kennedy.

"Yes."

"They must have kept them below, out of sight," said Pete. "They knew we couldn't avoid recognizing them."

"That's what," agreed Joe Floyd.

"After all," summed up Pete, "I don't see that it makes a spark of difference. We know now that the company of the *Dragon's Fang* consists of seven individuals. It's not probable they have any more concealed in the hold. One of them we think to be friendly to us."

"Sure as you're born!" drawled Joe.

"We know what their intentions are, and the purpose of their voyage. All we've got to do is to watch out, and catch them if they start anything."

"I wish they would come to clinches," said Kennedy. "By the Tail Feathers of the Grosbeak! I don't like this armed neutrality."

CHAPTER X

THE POISON BALL. JOE FLOYD TALKS TO AH FAT

WHEN Pete came on deck the next morning, his attention was at once attracted by the way Dope was acting. He was playing with a little, dark-colored ball. He would sniff it, and throw up his nose in a peculiar way, as if the scent at once attracted and repelled him. Then he would gaze at it with his head sagaciously cocked on one side, and paw it with his foot. He chased it in this way from one side of the deck to the other, never—Pete observed—taking it in his mouth.

“What have you got there, old boy?” inquired the lad.

He picked it up to examine it more closely. Dope sat on his hind quarters, and watched him with an inquiring eye. The object was not larger than a golf ball, and it had a strange, fragrant odor that Pete did not recognize. On closer inspection the ball was discovered to be of some waxy substance. When Pete cut it through with his knife, he found it of the same putty-like consistency throughout. The odor was stronger as he opened it, and Dope sniffed again inquiringly, at

the same time whimpering in a way Pete did not quite understand.

One of the first lessons the mastiff had learned in his puppyhood was never to eat anything except from the hand of his master, or when given to him by one in whom he had confidence. Adherence to this rule had probably preserved his life to the present period, for Captain Pete was aware that his enemies had a number of times attempted to poison the dog in the early days of his warfare with the smugglers of Puget Sound.

As he turned the strange object over inquiringly, Joe Floyd joined him. The rancher's olfactory nerves must have been highly developed, for he caught the odor when still ten feet distant, and looked surprised and interested:

"What's up, Captain Pete?" he inquired, this time without the usual drawl.

"I found Dope playing with this thing," explained Pete, holding out the two halves of the ball. "He seemed inclined to eat it, but has been trained not to gobble anything except I or somebody he knows give it to him."

"I see," said Floyd, taking the globe from Pete. He smelt it curiously, and passed it back with a grave face.

"It stinks like a Chinaman," he said. "I seem to remember the smell, but can't place it. I think it's a poison ball that's been chucked over to the

dog by my friend Wong. Put it away careful. I'll make that fellow eat it if I get the chance."

Pete put the suspicious ball away in a tin can in his private locker, and, on Joe's advice, washed his hands carefully, and cleaned the paws of the mastiff, where they had come in contact with the suspected object.

Lee Sing strolled aboard the *Gracie* in the course of the morning with his usual debonair manner. Pete had kept the mastiff below, out of sight, since finding the poison ball, but when the pirate made his appearance Floyd called him on deck. They were both watching the Captain's face unobtrusively, but no change in expression displayed that he had anything to do with the suspected attempt on the dog's life. While they were conversing, Scar-faced Jake and Todd appeared on the deck of the *Dragon's Fang*, and went to work at some trivial job. Lee Sing seemed to observe that the others were interested in their appearance, and said in a casual way:

"I've got a queer crew this trip. Three Chinamen, and two Americans I picked up in Victoria. I wasn't sure they would mix in with my countrymen, but they begged to come, and I needed more men." He added explanatorily, "They started a 'rough house' down below several days ago. Wong put them in irons, and didn't let them out until last night."

"I should judge they were tough customers from their looks," observed Kennedy.

"Not any tougher than Wong!" smiled the pirate. "I think he has already made them respect him. My mate is a determined man, and a bad one to cross. I never had any trouble with him myself. It is said," he concluded confidentially, "that he was one of those terrible Chinese pirates in his early days."

After the *Dragon's Fang* Captain had taken his departure, our three friends regarded each other in bewilderment.

"By the Tiger's Tooth!" ejaculated Kennedy.

"By the Great Horn Spoon!" exclaimed the rancher.

Pete resorted to slang to express his amazement:

"Wouldn't that cork you?" he inquired of the other two. "What do you think about that? For audacity and cleverness that fellow takes the cake!"

"He's smarter than a steel trap," assented Floyd.

"It was necessary to account for Long Tom's meeting with Scar-faced and his friend at the Rancherie last night." This was Pete talking. "And Lee Sing does it so skillfully we can't pick a hole in his explanation. Dope's friend Wong carries his villainy in his face, and Lee Sing up and tells us he was a pirate in his youth. Having presumably reformed in later life. Well, well, well!"

"This Lee Sing makes me some uneasy," con-

fessed Joe. "I didn't know I had any nerves, but this chap seems to be getting on them."

"You fellows can eat that Mongolian dinner to-day!" burst out Kennedy. "I'm going to stay at home, and keep house. I reckon I'll put in the time oiling up my gun."

Pete and Joe smiled. They were all impressed with a sense of the extraordinary cleverness of their opponent, and felt the air charged with subtle menace and treachery. They seemed in no danger of immediate violence, and were perfectly competent to protect themselves from anything of that sort, but the intangible something that had entered their lives since coming in contact with these yellow miscreants made them feel as if they were in a dark room surrounded by pit-falls. The other two quite approved the revenue officer's determination to remain away from the dinner. It seemed absurd, but neither could avoid feeling that some crisis might arise on board the *Dragon's Fang*, or that some devilish, crafty attempt might be made upon them during the meal. This possibility was so impressed on their minds that Kennedy was instructed if they did not appear at a stipulated hour from the cabin of the pirate craft, to come on board, as if in a friendly way, and investigate the cause of their non-appearance.

At three o'clock, Captain Pete and Floyd made their visit to the sealer. The bandy-legged mate met them at the gang-way, and Captain Lee Sing

promptly thrust his head out of the after-companionway:

"Come right down, gentlemen!" he said, with a courtesy of manner that would have done no discredit to a member of the upper ten.

The bulk-head in the quarters below had been moved forward nearly to amidships until it left the after cabin an unexpectedly spacious apartment in a vessel of that class. It was some twenty feet long, and fifteen feet from starboard to port. A carved teak-wood table stood in the middle. The legs were clamped to the deck, and it was evident the entire interior had been refitted to suit the luxurious requirements of this astonishing Mongolian. The walls were hung with silken draperies, and a rich brocade had been tacked over the ceiling to conceal the bareness of the beams above. A silver hanging lamp, almost in the nature of a chandelier, burning perfumed oil, was suspended over the table. It diffused a soft light over the gorgeous scene, and completed the atmosphere of sensuousness which, despite themselves, lulled the senses of the guests.

The Americans were keenly on the alert, and though they did their best to appear at ease, it is probable Lee Sing detected their state of mind. His manner was perfect, and a more courteous host never presided at table. The viands were, for the most part, inexplicable to Pete and Floyd, and some of the courses were served in such strange form that

the Americans were puzzled as to how to eat them. Unconsciously, they both assumed their best table manners, and met the Chinaman's suave courtliness with all the dignity and politeness they could assume. At the same time, they took care to eat from no dish to which the Chinaman did not help himself first. It was possibly a point of eastern etiquette with which they were unacquainted, but Lee Sing punctiliously, and even ostentatiously, tasted every dish and sampled every fluid of which they partook. At the last the pirate produced a bulbous flask of green glass, such as we have seen him once before partake in the secret chamber in Victoria with Wong. He carefully filled the three tiny glasses, and raising his own, said in the polished manner of best society:

"Gentlemen, I wish you success in all your undertakings. May we meet again, and frequently."

They pledged him. It was impossible to maintain their suspicious attitude in the face of this treatment, and they arrived at the end of their dinner without any of the complications they had vaguely feared. When they came on deck, the first thing they were aware of was Kennedy standing in the wheel-house door with a rifle in his hand. A second glance assured Pete he was cleaning it, but his first impression had been that the revenue officer was ready to begin the war with the *Dragon's Fang*.

It was now the tenth of June, and after repeated

conferences with his two companions, our hero came to the determination to remain in Sitka a month before starting on the final stage of their journey. The relations between the two crews continued much as at the beginning, but Lee Sing, although he freely visited the *Gracie*, did not disclose his own intentions. By this time he had succeeded in so ingratiating himself that Pete and even Kennedy had lost the feeling of antagonism with which they first viewed him. Joe Floyd, however, hung stubbornly to his conviction that the Chinaman was "bad medicine," and Dope, although he was usually kept on board, and only accompanied his master ashore in a leash, continued to show clearly his suspicious attitude toward their neighbors. If it had been a poison ball that Dope was playing with the morning after his encounter with Wong, the attempt on his life was apparently never repeated.

Although he was almost lulled to a sense of security, Pete was greatly pleased one morning when he observed signs of unusual activity on the *Dragon's Fang*. Shortly, Captain Lee Sing came, and announced he was going to take his departure that afternoon for Unalaska.

During the time the two little vessels had been lying next each other, Joe Floyd had been sleeplessly watching an opportunity to have a private talk with his friend Ah Fat of the pirate crew. For some reason, apparently without intent on the part

of the other Chinamen, this had hitherto seemed impossible. Wong kept close watch over his men, and seemingly Ah Fat had never been ashore unless in company with one or more of the other members of the crew.

It happened that the rancher had made an expedition early that morning to the Hot Springs of Sitka. They have not been mentioned before, but are among the surroundings which go to make the Alaskan city famous. They are ten miles below the town and are strongly medicinal, being impregnated with iron, sulphur, and magnesia. They are reported to be beneficial for many diseases, and a certain cure of rheumatism and skin disorders. A hospital was originally maintained there for the use of the employees of the Russian Fur company, and the Indians have always resorted to them.

Joe had taken his lunch with the intention of remaining away the whole day, and Dope had gone with him for the sake of the exercise. He returned earlier than he had intended, and met Ah Fat, who had been sent ashore on some errand taking him to the further end of the town. It was one of those pieces of good fortune which happen when least expected.

As Floyd came into the outskirts of the village with the great mastiff, Ah Fat suddenly appeared before him. They were half a mile from the wharf, and no one around to observe that their meeting was more than a casual *rencontre*.

Ah Fat's face was wreathed in smiles, and he actually fawned on the huge rancher in his gladness. Joe, fully as much pleased, wrung the man's hand in a bone-crushing grasp.

"Now, Ah Fat," he said. "Tell me all about it quick, before anybody turns up to interrupt us." In his coolie dialect of pigeon English, Ah Fat told him a story which showed the false security into which they had been betrayed by Lee Sing.

It appeared one of the crew of the *Dragon's Fang* had worked with Ah Fat as house servant in a Victorian English family. Ah Fat was a secretive man, and while he completely gained the other's confidence, he had not disclosed his own affairs. In consequence, the former member of Lee Sing's pirate crew had become confidential with him, and when, after the *Gracie's* departure, the *Dragon's Fang* expedition had been determined upon, he invited Floyd's friend to join the pirates. The Celestial crew seemed to know Lee Sing's plans, and to be aware they were going on the quest of gold, the location of which was indicated on a chart found on the body of Blondin, whom Lee Sing and Wong had murdered. It seemed, Ah Fat said, Lee Sing suspected the Frenchman had confided the details of his discovery in the northern wilds to the ex-revenue man. Consequently, Kennedy's movements had been watched, and his conjunction with Captain Pete noted. The pirate, he said, knew that Captain Gaignic was the same Captain Pete

who had figured so prominently in smuggling affairs on Puget Sound some years before. They intended to baffle the intentions of Kennedy and Graignic, even if they had to resort to murder to accomplish it. When Ah Fat became aware of all this, and of the certainty of the plot to involve his friend Floyd in its meshes, he determined to accept the invitation, and become one of the *Dragon's Fang* crew.

So far as to the past. Ah Fat's knowledge of the definite future plans of Lee Sing was not great. He affirmed Wong had said they were going straight to Unalaska, there to await a chance to get through the ice pack in the Bering Sea, to the mouth of the Yukon. He thought it improbable there would be any immediate collision between the pirates and Floyd's friends unless Lee Sing had reason to believe the latter were going to beat them to the goal at Blondin's creek. In that case, there would be war to the knife, and knife to the hilt.

In conclusion, the coolie assured Floyd he could count on him to the last drop of blood in his body. He would contrive at all risk to warn the *Gracie* in case the necessity seemed urgent. On the whole, Joe was satisfied. Now he knew just where they were, and what they had to depend upon. Before they parted it was arranged that in need for communication between them at any future time when the vessels might be together, Ah Fat should wear

a red turban, or Floyd display a white handkerchief, as a signal.

Floyd and Dope took another walk into the country, and did not return to the *Gracie* until an hour later. As he came over the side, the *Dragon's Fang* was going away from the dock. Lee Sing stood in the stern waving his yellow hand in adieu to Pete and Kennedy.

CHAPTER XI

A HUNTING TRIP—CAPTAIN SENKIL AND THE REVENUE CUTTER

IT must be confessed our party of amateur gold seekers breathed more freely after the departure of the *Dragon's Fang*, and Joe Floyd's story of his interview with Ah Fat did not lessen this feeling.

At the end of a week, however, they found themselves growing tired of inaction. Kennedy was for continuing the voyage, and trusting to luck to get through the ice in the Bering Sea. Pete was convinced it would not be of the slightest use, and that this was a case of the more haste—the less speed. Finally Joe Floyd made the happy suggestion that they hire a couple of Indian guides, and take a hunting trip in the interior. The idea was hailed with acclamation, and they began to make their preparations. The chief of customs recommended two of the Indians at the Rancherie. He said they were successful hunters and reliable men, and advised the *Gracie's* party to follow their guidance implicitly when they reached the hunting ground.

Hunting in the impenetrable Alaskan forest differed from anything they had ever experienced.

The party went prepared to protect themselves from the insects that made the forest almost uninhabitable even to the beasts of the wild. They had been told bodies of dead bears that had perished by starvation—because of being blinded by the flies so that they could not forage—were not infrequently found, and even moose were occasionally deprived of sight in this way. The harbor master said the woods were a paradise for bears because the wind-falls of timber and the thickness of arboreal growth, united to the plentifulness of berries, made ideal conditions for the animals, and *vice versa* for those hunting them.

During their absence Long Tom kept ship, at his own suggestion. They were gone a week, and had the time of their lives. Pete actually got a silver tip with his Paradox gun. Floyd also distinguished himself by his wood craft, and the Indian guides found that the old rancher knew almost as much about the wilderness as they did. Kennedy used much ammunition, because he blazed away at every living thing he saw, regardless of its usefulness after he brought it down. Altogether, the trip was a welcome divertisement following the trying period they had been passing through. They returned to the *Gracie* refreshed in spirit, and ready for anything that might turn up.

Nothing did turn up, and they lingered in Sitka day after day until they were all deadly tired of the monotony. It was getting on to the end of June,

and Pete determined to make a start the first of July. It was barely possible the Bering Sea might prove navigable by that time. They thought it probable that Lee Sing would have left Unalaska. If such were the case, there was nothing to prevent them from waiting there until a further advance was practicable.

In order to reach the mouth of the Yukon River from Sitka involves a longer deep water voyage than one unacquainted with the geography of the northern part of the United States would realize. The Gulf of Alaska, a vast body of the Pacific Ocean, occupies the space between the two southernmost points of the Alaskan peninsula. Seward's purchase from Russia began at a point of territory on about the fifty-fifth degree of north latitude. The English possessions, or rather the Dominion of Canada, generally known as British Columbia, occupies the country to the east, but Seward in his bargain from the Russians bought a strip of coast land extending from fifty-five to sixty north latitude. From here the United States boundary line runs northward along the one hundred and forty-first parallel of longitude as far as the Arctic Ocean, joining it at what is known as Beaufort Sea.

In this narrow stretch of coast line owned by the United States, most of the better known part of Alaska lay at the time of our story. Juneau, Wrangel, Sitka, and numerous smaller places had

been settled by nomad white men, who for years made a profitable though arduous livelihood by trading with the Indians, and trapping on their own account. This section of country has for many years supplied the greater portion of the finer quality of furs to civilization. The Russians have acquired the gorgeous sables and ermines, and other rare and imperial peltries in use among their nobility from this hunting ground. The dense forest, and protected coast line, fringed and dotted with a lace of islands, made the territory a happy hunting ground, teeming with animal life.

Alaska proper, the real peninsula, extends from the hundred and forty-first parallel of longitude westward as far as the one hundred and sixty-eighth. The great indentation called the Gulf of Alaska hollows out the southern portion of the new acquisition. On the parallel of one hundred and fifty-two longitude, a headland juts out from the south, and trends to the west towards Siberia, the northwestern portion of the European continent. It is claimed by scientific men that this headland is the sole vestige remaining of a gigantic mountain chain which in ages gone by connected the eastern and western hemispheres. The headland or mountain range extends continuously westward nearly a thousand miles, and thereafter its course is indicated by a line of islands which resemble a string of beads leading clear to the shores of Siberia. These are known as the Aleutian

group, and it is along this pathway that daring men have proposed to construct a line of railway connecting America and Europe. In view of the stupendous works that are accomplished to-day by the advance of engineering science; the possibility of concentrating vast sums of money on designated purposes; and the available army of skilled and industrious workers, it seems possible that this utopian dream may be realized.

Captain Pete and his little ship's company did not bother their heads about these things, or the future possibility of stepping into a parlor car in New York and traveling continuously from there to the Mediterranean Sea. Captain Pete's first problem was to cross the eleven hundred miles of north Pacific Ocean which intervened in one vast stretch of salt water between Sitka and Unalaska. It was necessary to go five or six hundred miles south of the point to which he was ultimately bound, the mouth of the Yukon River, in order to do this. He was compelled to make this detour because Unimak Pass, between the end of that great projecting headland and the string of Aleutian Islands was the only safe place where he could get through with the *Gracie* into the Bering Sea.

Our adventurers had no difficulty replacing the stores consumed since beginning their trip. The Sitka merchants carried large stocks of the best lines of goods. As a matter of fact, as one goes north, stores of inferior quality drop out of exist-

ence. The inhabitants of Alaska require, demand, and receive the very best of everything, and are perfectly willing to pay the increased price.

All were glad to be at sea, and to settle down again to routine shipboard life. The waters of this northern ocean were teeming with animal life beyond all they had ever known. Whales were constantly in sight. One morning a tremendous splashing called them all on deck. About a quarter of a mile ahead a fight was going on between several huge creatures. They levelled their glasses, and viewed the conflict with amazement. It was a scene not often gazed upon by human eyes. Three "killers" had attacked a bowhead whale. The latter was a tremendous creature, probably weighing twice as much as the combined bulk of the killers. Pete estimated that from the end of flukes to the point of his nose was eighty to ninety feet, and so far as they could judge, its body was at least fifteen or twenty feet thick.

The killers, also a variety of whale, were not more than eighteen or twenty feet in length. They are an active and enterprising fish—or mammal rather, for they bring forth their young alive—and of a fierce disposition, and ravenous appetite which impels them to attack anything in their vicinity. The conflict was furious, and it was evident the unfortunate leviathan was getting the worst of the battle. His nimble assailants would leap in the air and come down on the exposed por-

tion of his body, seemingly attempting to stun him with the impact of the fall. When the ponderous bowhead attempted to "sound"—that is, go beneath the water—the alert killers dived and drove him to the surface again, where they flayed him mercilessly. His bulk and comparative slowness made him unequal to the struggle despite his enormous strength.

The bowhead soon grew feebler. He ceased his fierce rushes, and the frenzied flapping of his tail and fins, and lay motionless on the surface of the sea. Even the muscles of his jaws relaxed, and the lower one, which seemed to be attached to the head by a ball and socket joint, fell. This left his cavernous mouth wide open, and our voyagers could see his huge white tongue, seven or eight feet long, dangerously exposed. The killers also saw it. It seemed to be the primary object of their attack on the whale, for they eagerly crowded around the mouth, and actually gobbled that tongue up as a captive lion would a piece of flesh thrown between the iron bars of his cage.

That settled the whale. The killers were satisfied with the tid-bit they had secured for their morning repast, and disappeared, leaving the dying mammoth to his fate.

A couple of hours after they left the dead whale, they saw smoke in the distance. From the rapidity with which it became perceptible, it was evident a steamer was approaching on a line that would

bring the two vessels together. Before long the hull of the stranger was in view.

"A revenue cutter!" announced Pete. "It must be the *Deer*. I heard she was cruising up here to prevent poaching on the seal herds of the Pribilof Islands."

"Why!" observed Kennedy. "The Pribilofs are not around here, are they?"

"No," replied Pete, the all knowing. "They are in the Bering Sea. On the other side of the Aleutian Islands. I believe about four hundred miles from Dutch Harbor."

"Dutch Harbor?" repeated Floyd. "That's somewhere near Unalaska, isn't it?"

"Yes," Pete answered. "I think they are only four or five miles apart. They are, I understand, rival trading stations. Each one is headquarters of a powerful company which employs a number of hunters and trappers, beside dickering with the natives of these bleak wilds for the skins from which the markets of the world are supplied with fur."

"What is the *Deer* doing here?" inquired Kennedy. "We must be some distance from the Aleutian chain."

"Three or four hundred miles," answered Pete. "I believe Captain Senkil of the cutter *Deer* has the general supervision of these northern waters. The sealers and traders are lawless fellows, and when the employees of the different companies

come together, there is often strife and even bloodshed. But I don't know what Captain Senkil is doing so far east. He would seem to be off his beat."

Pete's surmise was right, for the ensign flew at the cutter's peak, and every line of the smart little vessel indicated her character. She headed for the *Gracie*, and an officer, from the quarter deck of the cutter, ordered Pete through his speaking trumpet to heave to, as he desired to come aboard. It was Captain Senkil himself, togged out in all the bravery of uniform and brass buttons, who came over the side, and greeted our adventurers cordially. They retired to the cabin, and sat down for a comfortable chat. Captain Senkil had none of the stiffness or severity of the naval martinet in his make-up, and accepted our mariners as respectable members of society, travelling on legitimate business. Pete told the officer they were bound for the Yukon River, and intended to ascend it on a trading and exploring expedition, as much for pleasure as for profit.

They found Senkil knew of the revenue officer, and Captain Pete, although he had never before run across them. He had been stationed in north-western waters for a number of years, and was, as it turned out, a warm friend of Collector Hogan of Port Townsend. He had also heard of Dope, and the presence of the mastiff served to establish the identity of his master.

"What are you doing so far east, Captain Senkil?" inquired Pete, with some curiosity.

"Well," he returned, "I guess I'll go back with you as far as Unalaska. The truth is," he added, "that I took a cast around to see if I couldn't find out what had become of a queer craft that interests me very much. It's a sealing schooner with a non-descript crew of Chinese and white men which has been lying in the harbor at Unalaska for several weeks. They are law-abiding so far as I know, but the outfit seemed to have possibilities of evil. By the way," he interrupted himself, "they said they were outward bound from Sitka." Pete, and Kennedy, and Joe had simultaneously become alert as the captain proceeded with his tale. "The schooner, the *Dragon's Fang* was her name, disappeared night before last without any intimation of her destination. The whole incident was mystifying. I can't help feeling there is something wrong about them, although the captain was a plausible fellow. To conclude my yarn," he continued, "I did not believe they had ventured into the Bering Sea, for they were liable to get nipped in the ice. Having nothing in particular in the line of duty, I took a cast back through these waters to see what they were up to."

"Didn't run across them, did you?" inquired Kennedy significantly.

"No," replied the officer. "I see my story inter-

ests you, and shouldn't wonder if you knew something of this craft yourself?"

Pete nodded affirmatively, while the others waited for him to do the talking. He was not sure how far to confide the extent of his knowledge of the *Dragon's Fang* and its crew to the master of the cutter. He felt it unwise to divulge anything that would possibly lead to the adventures of the "Yellow Bird Gold Mining Company" being involved in the meshes of the law as witnesses against the Lee Sing outfit. He was convinced the *Dragon's Fang* was formerly an innocent sealing schooner, and had been stolen from Victoria harbor by its present possessors. This constituted a serious crime in sea-faring communities known as barratry, and was a breach of the law liable to be punished by heavy penalty. If he confided his suspicions to the naval man, he knew the other would start in determined pursuit of Lee Sing. Of course the imprisonment of the pirates would remove all danger to the *Gracie's* company in the prosecution of their mining enterprise. On the other hand if *they* were detained to testify against the *Dragon's Fangers* it would prevent them from going to Blondin's placer mine during the present season. He was anxious to get there at all hazards, for he strongly felt the Frenchman's lucky discovery was liable to be duplicated at any moment. He knew the news of such a find would flood even the wilds of Alaska with a hoard of

prospectors who would turn up every stone to see if there was gold beneath.

"Yes, we know something of them," he admitted. "The *Dragon's Fang* was moored within thirty feet of us at the dock in Sitka, and Captain Lee Sing was a frequent visitor on board the *Gracie*."

He paused as if he was through speaking. Captain Senkil regarded him critically, and then shifted the gaze of his inquiring eyes to Floyd and Kennedy. It made them uneasy, for they saw the master of the revenue cutter suspected Pete of concealing something, but they determined to let their young leader act as spokesman. Senkil turned back to Pete:

"I've heard that politics makes strange bed-fellows, but I swear I can't understand why there should be any friendship between you, Captain Pete, and that piratical set of miscreants who manned the *Dragon's Fang*. I see there is something you three are not inclined to let out, and although I am satisfied you're all right, I have half a mind to insist that you open up and tell me what you know."

As he uttered the last words his tones had an imperative note, and he looked rather sternly from one to the other of our friends.

Pete saw they were on the verge of a misunderstanding. He was aware of the importance of not falling out with Captain Senkil. It was advisable

to keep on the right side of the master of the northern seas. He had heard of Senkil as a first rate man, although his position as sole arbiter—and court of last resort, in many instances—in these waters had inclined him to be arbitrary. He came to a rapid decision, and turning squarely to the officer said:

“You are right in your surmise, Captain Senkil. We know more than I have told about these Chinese, but upon my honor as a man, I can swear to no crime, or even illegality, they have committed on this trip. Captain Kennedy and I both knew Lee Sing in Victoria where he posed as a tea dealer, although in reality actively engaged in opium-smuggling and coolie-running through the San Juan archipelago into the United States. Even now I am not telling the full extent of our knowledge, and frankly, Captain, I hope you will not insist on my doing so. I give you my word that what I know of the man and his outfit do not seem to me to bring them within the scope of your jurisdiction. I may tell you further we ourselves are going to Alaska on a private enterprise, and that there is a strong possibility—even a certainty—Lee Sing is bound on the same quest. If you detained him and his vessel for a few months it would be the best thing that could occur for our interests, but—and here, Captain, is the nigger in the wood pile—we must be able to go forward while he is held.

Captain Senkil listened to this somewhat involved explanation with puzzled, but softening features. Like most men of his kidney he could not brook opposition, but was easy enough to deal with if his fur were stroked along the grain.

"Well, well," he said with a perplexed smile. "I guess it's all right, Captain Pete. I won't push you any further than you want to go, but if you feel that you could give me any hint that will lead me towards the solution of this puzzle I heartily wish you would do so."

Pete thought a moment before he replied.

"You have got them sized up right, at any rate, Captain Senkil. They are a gang of 'piratical miscreants,' and if anything is certain, it is that they would break any, or all laws, on the slightest provocation."

CHAPTER XII

CAPTAIN SENKIL CATCHES THE DRAGON'S FANGERS SEAL POACHING

WHEN the *Gracie* arrived in the beautiful little hill-enclosed inner bay of Unalaska, the revenue cutter *Deer* already lay there at anchor. They had expected this, for Senkil said at the conclusion of their interview that he "guessed he'd go back and patrol the Bering Sea." Apparently he had been thinking over the problem presented to him by the *Dragon's Fang*, for the next morning he sent a boat to the *Gracie* with a polite note to Pete asking him to visit him on the *Deer*. When the lad read the invitation aloud to Kennedy and Joe, all three were curious to know what it meant.

"If worst comes to worst I don't believe it will do any harm to tell Senkil the story of Blondin's discovery of gold on the Yukon," said Pete. "If I did so under the seal of secrecy, I do not believe he would take advantage of it."

"Of course not," agreed the other two.

"Furthermore he is inclined to be friendly with us, and if he knew our secret he might assist us in many ways. The only difficulty with men like him is that official duties frequently conflict with their

personal relations. These naval officers get a moral sense in the performance of official duty which is different from that of the average civilian. Senkil is a warm-hearted fellow, and I believe he would do any good-natured thing that he personally could to further our plans. But if it appeared to him that we were necessary to his purposes in the matter of pressing a criminal investigation against Lee Sing he would not consider our private interest a moment. His first duty would lie in the conviction of the Chinaman, and he'd ruthlessly hold us until we had served his necessity."

Pete and Captain Senkil faced each other across the table in his after cabin. Senkil's manner was cordial, and gave no hint of authority. Pete did not know what to expect.

"Mr. Graignic," began the officer, rivetting our hero's eye. "Since our talk on the *Gracie* I have been doing a heap of thinking. I believe I see a ray of light. Perhaps this is none of my business. I'm inclined to think it isn't, but I am taking a strong personal interest in the game. You may consider that nothing passing between us to-day will be counted by me as of official significance. What you told me of yourself and the *Gracie*, and what I have divined of Lee Sing and the *Dragon's Fang* intertwines into a story that excites my inquisitiveness to a high degree. I don't want you to feel I am prying into your personal concerns. But—" here he flashed a frank smile on Pete, "if you had

been stationed up here in this Arctic waste for two years as I have been, pent in on myself by my official duties, you would understand that a matter of this kind might prove strongly attractive. This is a sort of an apology for making myself obnoxious to you."

Pete was much taken by the officer's preamble. He liked Senkil, and believed it would be safe to intrust him with the whole story of the "Yellowbird Gold Mining Company." His Indian blood, however, inclined him to caution, and he determined not to give up his secret unless it was necessary to avoid complications.

"Now," continued Senkil. "I want to say one word and put a big interrogation point after it."

"What is it?" asked Pete with a notion of what the answer would be.

"Gold?"

Pete had anticipated the question in his mind. The officer's blue eyes dug into his dark ones like gimlets, and the lad could not avoid smiling:

"Right!" he said simply.

The officer drew a long breath of satisfaction. It was evident he was working out the details of the puzzle as if it were a chess problem, and was greatly pleased at every step forward through the complexities.

"Look here, Captain Pete," burst out Senkil, "I believe I'm on the trail, and I'm going to tell you what I think. You can confirm it or not as you

please. I have heard hints of placer gold in Alaska and Siberia ever since I've been on this northern station. I'm a bit of a geologist myself, and know it to be probable that some day a discovery will be made up here that will set the world ablaze. Now, have *you* made that discovery, or has Lee Sing made it, and is that what you're both bound for in these extraordinary expeditions?"

"You are more or less right, Captain Senkil," conceded Pete. "As man to man in confidence, I am going to tell you that Kennedy and I, and Lee Sing know of the discovery of an important placer deposit on the upper Yukon. We got our information in different ways from the same man."

"Where is the man?" asked the officer.

"Dead," replied Pete.

"Murdered?" interrogated the master of the revenue cutter.

"Yes," acknowledged Pete.

"Lee Sing, of course?" queried the other.

"Suspected, but no legal evidence," answered Pete.

The officer leaned his head on his hand, his gaze still boring into Pete's eyes.

"Lee Sing is aware of your knowledge?"

"He is," answered Pete.

"It's all clear!" summed up Senkil. "Except about the *Dragon's Fang*, and its crew. Shall I ask more questions?"

"If you wish," replied Pete. "You've got about all."

The captain of the revenue cutter thought a moment, and inquired:

"About the schooner they've christened the *Dragon's Fang*?"

"Stolen outright, I fancy."

"It seems curious," said Senkil tentatively, "that Lee Sing should have been able to organize his ship's company so completely, and at such short notice."

"I am told," Pete answered, "on what seems good authority, that Lee Sing was formerly a notorious pirate in the southern hemisphere. Wong, his present mate, served him in the same capacity at that period, and two members of the crew were also with him formerly."

"I see!" Senkil said.

He pondered deeply for a short time, and Pete did not speak. At last he lifted his eyes:

"About the murdered man who discovered the gold in Alaska? I assume there is no proof to connect the Chinaman with the crime?"

"We know it, but the evidence is purely circumstantial."

"Well," remarked Senkil, getting up and pacing the little apartment with his head bowed, and his hands in his pockets. "I must confess it is the most interesting adventure that has come to me since I have been in the north, and I have had many.

Count me as an ally. I am going to help you heart and hand. And," he added, "my impression is that you will need my aid before you are through. Those chaps will stop at nothing."

"That is my opinion," concluded Pete, as he arose.

When the summer thaw sets in in the interior of Alaska, it is late in the season before the heat from the sun is sufficiently ardent to loosen the fetters of ice which bind the waters in the upper reaches of the Yukon River. A day comes at last when the rotten ice can no longer hold together, and it disintegrates little by little until the great stream from its source to the mouth is one vast trough vomiting its gelid contents into the basin of the Bering Sea. The Yukon is one of the mighty rivers of the earth in length and volume, while the Bering Sea narrows in the northeast, forming what is known as Norton's Sound. Still further north it contracts to discharge its waters through Bering Strait into the Arctic. St. Lawrence Island on the south fences off the main body of the sea. It forms a smallish, almost enclosed area between the eastern and western hemispheres. Into this circumscribed space the Yukon hurls its burden of broken ice.

I have been at some pains to explain the situation which confronted Captain Pete and the crew of the *Gracie*. It was this condition only which prevented them from sailing lightly across to the mouth of the Yukon. At this very time that portion of the Bering Sea was filled with ice. It was not one broken

sheet, but the surface of the water was covered with innumerable fragments varying from chunks the size of a paving stone, to cakes twenty or thirty feet across. The thickness of these cakes was computed to be seven-eighths below the water, and one-eighth on top. The temperature was mild as that of a summer resort in the Catskills because the sun was in evidence during the greater part of the twenty-four hours. At twelve or one o'clock—night in lower latitudes—the luminary would set in the north, leaving its lurid reflection on the horizon above the point of disappearance. Before the crimson rays had scarcely time to fade from the sky at the point where it sank beneath the sea, it would rise again in almost the same quarter. A little later, and it would swing its orbit in full sight around the apex of the earth.

The mass of floating ice is subject more or less to the caprice of King Boreas. A powerful and steady breeze will drive the ice fragments together, and mass it on one or the other of the continents forming its Eastern and Western boundaries. Should the King of the winds exhale his breath from the north or northeast it forces the ice out past St. Lawrence Island into the open Bering Sea. If from the south or southwest it congregates the glacial fragments in Norton's Sound, and further north at the narrow mouth of the strait. In short it is rarely the great ice field is not more or less in

motion. Subject also to the currents in this shallow sea which are constantly created by the varying degrees of temperature, the expanse of ice is a law to itself, and one which can be rarely interpreted by man. Little creeks form between the floes; open bays shape themselves here and there; at times wide channels split the pack as far as the eye can see, and allure vessels to seek the further end of the field. This hope has frequently proven fallacious, and resulted in the loss of the daring but injudicious navigator with his vessel and crew.

So far as Pete and Senkil could divine, it looked as if Lee Sing and the *Dragon's Fangers*, in their mad haste to reach the placer mine, had taken these hazards. The schooner had certainly laid its course to the northward from Unalaska. The Pribilof Islands, on which the vast herds of fur seal breed and make their home during a portion of the year, are only three or four hundred miles distant and in the path toward the mouth of the Yukon. It seemed possible the unscrupulous Chinamen had stopped to poach while awaiting an opportunity to make their way through the ice. Senkil was convinced by his futile search that the pirate was not to the eastward of the Aleutians, and it was inconceivable that they had laid their course westerly to Alaska. Ice was more plentiful along the coast, and it was constantly replenished from the mouths of the numerous creeks and rivers.

Senkil got his anchor aboard two days after, and steamed out of Unalaska harbor bound to the Pribilofs.

"Captain Pete," he had said while his jaws closed like the teeth of a steel trap. "If that smooth-faced free-booter is monkeying around those islands and stealing United States property I am going to bring him back in irons. If the outfit make any trouble about coming I'll turn the Gatling loose on them."

"In that case," smiled Pete, "my pathway up the river will be clear."

"I'll clear it for you—if I can do so in the line of duty!" affirmed the doughty naval officer.

During the ensuing week the stockholders of the "Yellowbird Gold Mining Company" spent most of their time watching for the smoke of the returning revenue cutter. The prevailing winds had blown from the south and southwest, and they knew it was improbable, under existing conditions that even the most reckless navigator would brave the dangers of a passage to the Yukon delta.

"There she comes," quietly observed Pete to his two companions on the afternoon of the fifth day. The little cutter steamed in, and dropped anchor in her usual berth. Before she was barely moored Floyd, who happened to be looking out through the passage, remarked softly:

"Jewhillikens!"

A little sealing schooner that remarkably resem-

bled the *Dragon's Fang* was booming in under full sail.

"It's the *Dragon's Fang*!" Pete said, after a moment's examination with his glasses.

"What in thunder does it mean?" asked Kennedy.

Pete now had his eyes glued to the decks of the *Deer*. Nothing unusual appeared there, and Captain Senkil was getting into a small boat.

"I believe—" said Pete, thoughtfully. "I believe our friend, Captain Senkil, has found Lee Sing doing something he had no right to, and captured the sealer. He'd do it if he had to strain a point, and he probably has Lee Sing and the crew of the *Fang* confined below."

The boat left the *Deer*, and headed for the *Gracie*. Captain Senkil leaped alertly aboard and said:

"I want to talk to you three fellows. Come into the cabin."

They hurried below, and Kennedy asked breathlessly:

"What's up, Captain? Have you pinched the pirate?"

Senkil smiled, and leaned back in his chair. It was evident he was pleased with himself, and a bearer of glad tidings.

"Yes, I got 'em, darn 'em!" he said. "That is, most of them. One of the sailors was missing, and I can't make out what has become of him. Lee Sing says the man deserted in a small boat. I can't believe that. There's something behind it."

"Was the missing man named Ah Fat?" inquired Joe Floyd.

"Yes," replied Senkil, with a twinkle of interest. "Why?"

"That's part of the story I didn't tell you, Captain Senkil," began Pete. "I guess you'll have to hear the yarn from beginning to end."

"Tell me about Ah Fat, now!" said the naval officer.

"He was a friend of Floyd's, and a spy in the enemy's camp," answered Pete.

"By the Great Horn Spoon!" said Joe, dropping his syllables one by one. "If they have made away with Ah Fat—"

"It looks as if he might have followed Blondin," said Kennedy.

"Who's Blondin?" asked Senkil.

In response Pete told the tale of the inception of the "Yellowbird Gold Mining Company" from the very beginning, laying bare all the points he had hitherto kept from the captain of the *Deer*.

"I guess Kennedy is right," remarked that individual at the conclusion of the story.

Pete had been doing some thinking while he talked, and now he asked:

"Do you know what interval elapsed between Ah Fat's disappearance, and your capture of the sealer? And where was the *Dragon's Fang* at the time they say he went adrift in the open boat?"

"Lee Sing states," said the officer, "that they were fifty or sixty miles north of the Pribilofs and he 'cut his lucky' the day before I appeared."

"What did you arrest the pirate for?" asked Pete, curiously.

"What do you think?" he exclaimed, his face hardening. "Those lawless skunks got into a herd of females carrying young, on one of the small islands, and had started in to slaughter them! I would like to hang the fellow. Keel-hauling is too good for such men."

All knew enough about the fur seal industry to comprehend the enormity of this offense. Lee Sing must have been utterly unrestrained by fear of the law.

"What is the upshot of it all?" inquired Kennedy.

"Why," explained Senkil, "I put a prize crew aboard the *Dragon's Fang*, and they are bringing her in."

"We saw her!" confirmed the others.

"Lee Sing, and Wong are hand-cuffed together in my strong-room. The other four—two low-down renegades of white men, and two Chinamen—are confined in the hold. As soon as I get an opportunity—I'll send them to the nearest place where they can be tried by a United States Court."

"And the schooner?" inquired Pete.

"Libelled, of course. She'll lie here to await the Court's action."

"Her owner in Victoria will be glad to hear it," observed Pete. "Now he stands some chance of getting his property back."

"You seem pretty certain it's stolen," commented Senkil.

"Sure thing!" they all affirmed.

After Senkil's departure, Joe Floyd remained in thought. Kennedy and Pete knew his mind was occupied with the subject of Ah Fat. Although not interested to the same extent as Joe they both had a feeling that the probable fate of Floyd's Chinese ally had been more or less caused through his efforts in their behalf.

"By the Great Horn Spoon!" said Joe, suddenly awaking from his moodiness. "If I was boss of this outfit, Captain Pete, I'd get steam up mighty quick, and head for that spot north of the Pribilofs where Lee Sing says Ah Fat cut loose from him."

"Do you suppose that was the way of it?" asked Pete.

"This is how I got it figured out," answered Joe. "You fellows didn't know Ah Fat, but I want to tell you he wasn't no fool Chinaman. I reckon that even Lee Sing would have some trouble in pulling the wool over Fat's eyes. It seems possible Lee Sing and Wong may have got a notion he wasn't playing straight with them. If that was so I'd back Ah Fat to know what they were thinking about as soon as it formed in their minds. Then he'd say to himself that he had about as much chance of

a healthy life on board the *Dragon's Fang* as a snow ball in a bonfire. So, don't you see he'd naturally take to the boat, and the open sea, before he'd trust himself to the tender mercies of that gang of wild beasts."

"Right you are," said Kennedy, perfectly convinced.

"When do you want to start, Joe?" inquired Captain Pete.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GRACIE RESCUES AH FAT, AND BECOMES INVOLVED IN THE ICE-PACK

IT being decided to start at once in search of the missing Ah Fat, Pete went over to the *Deer* to tell his friend the captain the course they had determined on.

"I'm glad you came," said Senkil. "I wanted to see you. I have been thinking it might be the proper thing to make a search after Floyd's friend, Ah Fat."

"So have we," returned Pete. "We're going to start right away, and I came to let you know."

"Two are better than one," answered Senkil. "It seems possible a man's life is at stake. We can cover the ground in shorter time. The castaway will be in extremity, and time may be the last importance."

"What will you do with your prisoners?" asked Pete, as he saw a puff of vapor come out of the *Gracie's* steam pipe.

"There's a calaboose on shore," said Senkil. "The company used to put their 'drunks' in it. I reckon it's not very comfortable, but Chinese pirates cannot be choosers."

"Is it secure?" inquired Pete.

"I guess so," he replied. "Anyhow, if they escaped I don't see how they could get out of my reach. I've a long arm up here."

"Well then, I'm off!" concluded our hero.

"By the way," exclaimed the naval officer. "I came near forgetting! Lee Sing wants to see you."

Pete looked astonished, and as if he did not recognize the necessity of the desired interview.

"You'd better see him," urged Senkil. "He may tell you something you want to know."

"Nit!" slangily returned Pete. "He's too fly."

"Well, try him anyhow. It won't do any harm."

He accompanied Pete to the door of the strong-room, and our hero entered. Lee Sing and Wong were seated side by side on the deck. Their proximity was not a matter of choice, for the pirate chief and his mate were linked together by steel handcuffs attached to their wrists. Pete reflected that the partners in iniquity were joined together by spiritual fetters of crime as well as material ones of metal.

"I accidentally heard you were in port," remarked Lee Sing, "and asked this unjust man who has deprived us of our liberty, to allow me to speak to you."

"Yes," answered Captain Pete, who hardly knew what to say. "What can I do for you?"

"Nothing," answered the pirate, unexpectedly. "Perhaps, on the contrary, I can do something for

you. Would you like to have Blondin's chart of the creek where he discovered the placer mine?"

You might have knocked Captain Pete down with a feather duster. Why on earth should the man take this tack. Pete knew he had some hidden motive for the frank revelation of his connection with the Blondin murder that his words implied. But a moment's thought assured him that whatever the pirate's intentions were, it would be to the advantage of the stock holders in the "Yellowbird Gold Mining Company" if he secured the Frenchman's chart. So he said with an assumption of ease he was far from feeling:

"Of course I'd like to have it. I'm in search of that mine."

"Naturally," smiled Lee Sing.

He thrust the hand not confined by the irons into the breast of his blouse, and brought out a small leather-covered blank book. He held it on the deck by his manacled elbow, and turned the leaves over until he came to a page containing a rough pencil draft. Pete drew nearer, and gazed with all his eyes. It was unquestionably the representation the unlettered Frenchman had made of the place where he found the gold. Viewing it with the key of the directions Kennedy had received from the murdered man, he saw at a glance it was intended to be a picture of the mouth of the creek; the peculiar sand bar in front, and the snow-clothed mountain with twin peaks in the background. Beneath

it, and covering the ensuing page, were a number of almost illegible characters which he believed to be the field notes—as a surveyor would call them—of the unfortunate gold seeker.

“Take it!” resumed Lee Sing. “It looks as if it will be of no service to me, and you are heartily welcome to it.”

“Is there something I can do for you in return for this, Lee Sing?” asked Pete, earnestly. “If it is lawful I will gladly help you.”

“No,” answered the redoubtable Chinaman, and Pete fancied he saw a trace of sadness in the pirate’s face. “I know what it means to be in the clutch of United States law on a charge of this kind. There seems no escape, and I must pay the penalty. Probably imprisonment for a long term of years.”

For the first time in their acquaintance it occurred to Pete to feel sorry for this man. He admired the oriental hardihood with which he accepted his fate, and resigned himself to the consequences his acts had earned. Our hero put the notebook in his pocket, and returned to Captain Senkil.

If he had seen the pirate’s face, and heard his words to Wong after the door had closed, his heart would not have been inclined to pity.

“The young fool thinks I am weakening, and feels sorry for me,” he said to his mate. His

smooth face had assumed an expression of malignant ferocity.

"Why did you give him the map?" grunted Wong. They were speaking in the Chinese dialect.

"I want those white barbarians to find the creek, and gather the gold. When we escape—as we've escaped before, Old Wong—we'll flay them alive, and take the treasure. If we do not get free what odds about the gold."

Wong grunted in acquiescence.

The *Gracie* started on her search at once. Floyd fed the fire, and they forged rapidly ahead. In spite of their haste, the *Deer* picked them up four or five hours later, and the two laid their course straight for St. Paul Island. They sighted it at noon the next day, but did not stop. It had been agreed that one should take a wide circle to the east, and the other to the westward, and both return on converging lines to cover as much territory as possible.

On the ensuing day the *Gracie* ran into an ice field about one hundred miles northeast of St. Paul. The waters in front were covered with the dirty, blue-green cakes of gelidity to the edge of the horizon. Floyd took Pete's glasses, and climbed the rigging forward. After gazing into the frozen expanse ahead for a moment he suddenly threw up his hands with a yell of exultation. The next mo-

ment he slipped down the swifter, and was alongside of Captain Pete.

“Off there!” he exclaimed, pointing ahead. “I saw a skiff on an ice floe! I think a man was sitting on the bow!”

“How far in the ice-pack?” queried Pete, with a serious face.

“Two or three miles,” he answered.

They went to the bow, and examined the ice-field with careful attention. The boat could be plainly discerned. Both distinguished the figure of the Chinaman, apparently sitting despondently on the thwart with his head bowed on his breast. Pete blew the whistle repeatedly, but it did not arouse him from his stupor. It was evident he was in a bad way.

As they gazed one of those transitions which constantly occur in these fields took place. As if in obedience to the command of some directing power the floes in front of the stem of the *Gracie* began to undulate. The next moment a channel opened, extending each moment further until it almost reached the cake on which Ah Fat was marooned. Pete hesitated. Then with a wave of his hand he directed the course of the *Gracie*, and it entered the broadening ribbon of water. Providentially it grew wider as they advanced. Presently with a joyful shout Floyd leaped upon the ice, and ran to Ah Fat. The man had been sitting humped upon the gunwale of the skiff. He tried

to rise to his feet, but the effort was beyond him, and he sank back at full length.

Joe raised him in his arms, and brought him to the *Gracie*. Kennedy's hasty examination of the sufferer disclosed the fact that his left leg had been broken below the knee. This, and exhaustion from lack of food had reduced him to his helpless condition.

In a few minutes he regained his senses, and was able to answer Joe's questions. Lee Sing had heard Scar-faced Jake say he had seen Floyd and Ah Fat talking together. The pirate captain put him through what the metropolitan police call the "third degree." Ah Fat had defended himself so plausibly Lee Sing could not be positive of his treachery, but the coolie knew the man, and realized the seriousness of his danger. The same evening he had stolen the boat, and sneaked away in the dusk of the Arctic night from the *Dragon's Fang*. He had been discovered by Wong, but succeeded in getting into a drifting field of ice where his pursuers could not follow.

While Joe was occupied with his Chinese friend, Pete succeeded in turning the *Gracie's* head toward the open water, and was retracing his steps. Another unexpected sea change however, massed the ice and closed the channel by which he had come in. On the other hand it continued to broaden and open further towards the interior of the sea of ice. The Captain of the *Gracie* felt he had committed an in-



HE TRIED TO RISE TO HIS FEET

discretion by allowing his sympathy to lead him into this dangerous position, and promptly called Kennedy, and Joe, and Tom Long to a consultation. Scotch Jimmy was at the wheel.

Our adventurers realized their peril at a glance. As they talked they saw the ice pack mass more solidly. The open spot surrounding the *Gracie* remained intact. Pete confessed he was at a loss to suggest a means of escape, and Floyd looked serious. It fell to Kennedy to suggest a course of action:

"What's the matter with going ahead?" asked he. "If I'm not mistaken this channel in front points in the direction of the Yukon. As far as I can see we've got as much chance, and perhaps more, to come out on the northeast edge of this field of ice, as we have to bore our way back."

Pete consulted Floyd with his eyes. The rancher was evidently of Kennedy's opinion.

"All right," said he. "Here goes for the Yukon. Hard down with your wheel, Jimmy."

The *Gracie* had a full head of steam, and spun around on her heel like a top. She headed up through the passage at a ten knot gait, and the members of the "Yellowbird Gold Mining Company" started on the second stage of their journey.

Ah Fat recuperated rapidly. Kennedy and Floyd had much experience with injuries of this kind, and their rude surgery speedily made him comfortable. They reduced the fracture, and Ken-

neddy manufactured a pair of splints from barrel staves, and bound them on the injured leg so firmly that the bone had a chance to knit at the first intention. The Chinaman told them he had been caught the day before between two cakes of ice, and before he could get loose heard the bone crack like a pistol shot. The skiff was nearby, and with his last atom of strength he crawled to her and lay on the thwart he had occupied when they found him. In his haste to get away he had not been able to secure any food, and the three days he had been adrift without eating, together with the accident, had about drained his vitality.

Pete kept his fires roaring for he was determined to make all the progress he could in the desired direction. To his delight the channel in front continued open, and by his dead reckoning he calculated they must have made a hundred miles to the northeast before their advance was checked. During this time there had been a fresh westerly breeze which Pete thought exerted some unexplained influence on the ice formation.

At last the opening began to contract. Then the channel closed ahead of the *Gracie* and at the same moment a crevice appeared to the southward. It widened under Pete's gaze, and began like the first one to extend far into the interior of the pack. There was no room for hesitation, and no second choice. Pete entered the new channel, and this time they were speeding away from her goal.

"By the Tongue of the Ant Bear!" ejaculated Kennedy, who stood beside Pete. "It looks dickie, don't it?"

"We're in trouble I'm afraid," acknowledged Pete. He added after a moment. "Here's where my false bow comes in."

He called all hands except the helmsman, and they carried up the marked timbers, and put them together over the head, and when the job was accomplished our hero felt more secure for it seemed probable this unstable passage he was following might close with as little notice as the first. In that case the *Gracie* would become a dot in the sea of ice. The field was by no means a continuous and closely knitted mass, but composed of pieces, large and small, floating separately in the sea. Even with the *Gracie* involved in it he did not anticipate any great danger unless he attempted to go ahead at injudicious speed, or some condition should cause the floes to become more closely bound together. In either of these events the hull of the little vessel was in danger from the grinding impact of the jagged cakes.

The company of the *Gracie* had full reliance on their leader's seamanship, and believed that if anyone was competent to extricate them from their plight, he was the man. He saw how they felt, and it increased his sense of responsibility. Every faculty the lad possessed was stretched to its fullest tension. The call on his manhood was met by

a determination to bring them through the danger if it was in mortal man to accomplish the task. He did not leave his station forward an instant. While the others snatched their hasty meals below, he contented himself with a sandwich and a tin pot of coffee brought to him by the faithful Long Tom.

He sent the *Gracie* ahead only at quarter speed as he monotonously paced from rail to rail, from starboard to port, in a ceaseless wild-beast prowling that was indicative of his state of mind. All in a moment what he had feared from the first took place. The ice in front suddenly blotted out the channel along which he had been cautiously proceeding, and they were tossing, as helpless as a log of driftwood, in the middle of the vast area of floes.

The others gathered at the rail, and gazed helplessly at the gently moving chunks of ice. Pete did not interrupt his tramp from bulwark to bulwark. The engine was shut off, and the blades of the screw stopped revolving. Minute after minute elapsed, and the pack grew no thicker. At the end of a half hour of strained attention Kennedy suddenly boiled over:

"For God's sake, Pete," he burst out, "stop that tramping up and down and say something! You're like a wild animal in a cage."

Pete straightened his shoulders and turned with a dogged smile to the rest:

"Something has got to go!" he said. "If the *Gracie* can't, I must. However, I believe we will

come out all right if we have a bit of luck. So far as I can see we're safe now, so long as we haven't got way on, as we were in the channel. It's the possibility of a grind I'm afraid of. But it would take a heavy gale to shake this vast field of ice into motion, and there's no danger at this season of the year of its freezing hard enough to nip us. I believe," he concluded triumphantly, "that the worst we have to anticipate is drifting around in the pack for a week or two."

"That's good news!" said Kennedy. "If there's no danger we may as well be here as in Unalaska or Sitka."

"I bet Captain Senkil is wondering what has become of us," remarked Pete. "I wish we could tell him we found Ah Fat."

"I reckon he knows we can take as good care of ourselves as the next," Floyd said.

CHAPTER XIV

LEE SING AND THE PIRATES ESCAPE, AND FOLLOW THE GRACIE INTO THE SEA OF ICE

WHILE the *Gracie* was lying ice-bound in the Bering Sea, events were transpiring at Unalaska which will interest the reader.

Captain Senkil arrived again off St. Paul Island on the evening the crew of the *Gracie* rescued Ah Fat. He was disappointed that his consort was not in sight, and lay to awaiting her arrival. When she did not make her appearance by the next morning, he began to fear some mishap. With this idea he started on a voyage of discovery. When he arrived at a point some seventy-five miles northeast of the island, he found the waters covered by an impassable field of floe ice.

The naval officer had much experience in these latitudes, and his mind rapidly ran over all possible happenings to find one that could account for the *Gracie's* disappearance. He arrived at a conclusion very near the truth. Of course, he could not understand that our adventurers had deliberately made their way into the bosom of the ice pack with the purpose of rescuing the Chinaman,

but he was satisfied the little vessel had become encompassed among the floes, and either because of the general drift, or because they had followed some illusive channel opening before them, been carried so far afield they could not extricate themselves. Further reflection convinced him that if Captain Pete found himself surrounded he would decide to go ahead rather than attempt to come back to Unalaska. He hoped they had found the missing man, but whether they had or not felt sure he would see no more of the adventurers for the present.

Having exhausted all reasonable efforts to find either Ah Fat or the *Gracie* he turned back to Unalaska. On entering the little harbor he glanced toward the place where he had left the *Dragon's Fang* securely moored.

The sealing schooner was not there!"

A sudden misgiving seized the naval officer's heart. Before the *Deer* came to anchor, he dropped into a small boat and made his way to shore. The harbor master, who was also chief customs officer, and administrative head of the town, met him in perturbation at the landing:

"Captain Senkil," he stammered in nervous haste, "your prisoners broke out of the calaboose last night."

"Where is the schooner?" demanded the officer.

"She was gone from the harbor this morning too."

"And the man I left on board as care-taker?" inquired Senkil.

"We found him gagged and bound in a skiff in which he had drifted ashore."

"Take me to him at once," said the officer shortly.

The man was at the harbor master's house. He was a hardy sailor who had joined the navy in San Francisco. Senkil had no doubt of his good faith, but was anxious to gain some clue from him to the movements of the Chinamen. The sailor was cast down at having allowed himself to be kidnapped while on watch, but told a straight-forward story. He had been smoking a pipe on the after deck without the faintest idea there was any reason for vigilance. A noose had been flung about his neck, and he was hauled over backward without a chance to resist. A huge misshapen devil of a Chinaman—evidently Wong—had sprung upon his breast, and pinioned his arms to the deck. Several others aided, and he was tied and gagged before he even had an opportunity to howl for help. Then they had put him in the boat, and shoved it away from the side. He heard them get the anchor aboard the *Dragon's Fang*, and make sail. The next thing he knew his boat grounded on the beach, and he lay there until an Esquimau woman released him. The schooner had disappeared.

Senkil was mad clear through. He could hardly restrain his rage, but after a moment's thought he

made his way to the calaboose. It was a little stone building erected years before, and probably at that time a secure dungeon, but the salt damp had crumbled the mortar, and it had been an easy task for the Chinamen to make a hole large enough for them to crawl out. An iron marline spike lay on the stone floor of the cell, and evidently had been used to make the opening in the wall.

"I'm afraid this is going to make more trouble for Captain Pete and his friends," muttered Senkil. "Not but what I am to blame for leaving that gang of desperadoes in this ramshackly jail without putting a guard over them. Well, Lee Sing has got the best of this round. I hope I'll get another chance at him."

He returned to the *Deer*, and in twenty minutes was flying back toward the Pribilof Islands. He was certain Lee Sing would lay his course toward the north, and take any desperate chance to escape. His judgment was confirmed when he arrived on the boundary of the ice field. Far in the middle of the pack he could discern two faint upright black lines, like pencils showing against the lowering sky behind.

"That's the *Dragon's Fang*!" he said to himself as he put his glasses into the case. "Now the fat's in the fire! The *Gracie* is in the ice, and they will make for the Yukon as fast as they can, believing Lee Sing and the rest of his pirates to be in jail in Unalaska. The drift may even bring them to-

gether before they reach the delta, or by George! Lee Sing may get there first. I wish I could warn Captain Pete. It's a devil of a mess, and I am afraid some of it is my fault."

The drift had carried the *Gracie* to a point within a couple of hundred miles of the Arctic Circle. It had been an anxious time. Often crevices opened in the pack, and Pete, who kept a full head of steam, would follow them, hoping the ribbon of clear water might lead to some outlet. Time after time the hope proved illusive. Once they had made fifty miles following such a channel in the direction of the Alaskan coast. Then this had closed, and another one to the northward opened up. Pete did not think it worth while to follow this. He was sure the ice would grow thicker towards the mouth of Bering Strait, beside becoming dangerous because of its concentration.

They had now been in the ice field ten days. At night the sun barely dipped below the murky, fog-bound horizon. The daylight continued with scarcely perceptible diminution the whole twenty-four hours. Partly owing to his rugged constitution, and partly to Joe Floyd's nursing, Ah Fat's leg had nearly healed. The bone seemed to have knit firmly, and Joe had manufactured a rude crutch with which the coolie managed to hobble around the deck. He had become a favorite with the *Gracie's* crew, and announced his intention of remaining with them as long as they cared to keep him.

When Captain Pete came on deck one morning near the end of June it was apparent to him that a change was imminent. The sky was overcast, and the face of the sun red and lowering. He hastily consulted the barometer. It had fallen, and indicated heavy weather. As he anxiously examined the ice field to the west, Floyd and Kennedy joined him.

"You look worried, Captain Pete," observed Kennedy. "Do you think we are going to have a storm?"

"Yes!" replied our hero. "The barometer has fallen. It would not make much difference if we occupied the position we did three or four days ago, but we are close on the eastern edge of the pack, and I am afraid this gale coming from the northwest is going to set these floes tossing about in the water. If one of those heavy fellows," he pointed to a cake that projected seven or eight feet above the water, "should swing in against our hull it would knock a hole through the bottom big enough to let in the whole Bering Sea. Or if it jounced against the screw it would break the blades short off, and leave us a helpless wreck."

They stood in silence looking out over the ice. The floes were no longer tranquil. They tossed to and fro, and occasionally one would grind viciously against a second. Captain Pete was looking through the glass toward the west. Suddenly he exclaimed:

"By Jove, there's clear water ahead! We are almost out of the ice field! If we can carry through for two hours longer, everything will be lovely."

The young adventurer redoubled his caution and vigilance. He stood on the chocks at the bow of the *Gracie*, and scanned with eager eye every opening crack in the ice. A wave of his hand to right or left, and Tom Long, at the wheel, put the helm to starboard or to port. Foot by foot, almost inch by inch, he forced the vessel towards the open water. As they progressed the floes became more active, because they had more room, and were fewer in number. At last he coned the little vessel along through a channel hardly wide enough to permit of her passage, rounded a miniature iceberg that barred her path, and she suddenly shot into the open sea.

Pete pulled the whistle cord, and let out a triumphant screech as he took off his hat, and the others burst into an unanimous hurrah that could have been heard a mile away.

"Full speed ahead," said the lad. "And with good luck we'll reach the Yukon delta inside of twenty-four hours."

He laid his course by compass, and did not spare coal. Although the trip through the ice field had caused much expenditure of fuel, he had still about three tons on board. Barring accidents this was enough to carry them into the mouth of the great

river. Once inside he was certain to get wood in plenty. In case the coal gave out before he reached the delta, he was at any rate in an open sea. He could rely on canvas in place of steam.

The adventurers were in high spirits. In his elation, Kennedy swore many still more astonishing oaths, dealing with the tongues and stripes and tails of wild animals, than he had hitherto been able to conjure up. Ah Fat cast his crutches away as if he no longer needed their support. The gloomy atmosphere which had hung over the expedition disappeared, and all hands were in the blithest spirits. Of course this condition of affairs was largely founded on their assumption that Lee Sing and the crew of the *Dragon's Fang* were no longer a constantly threatening possibility. If they had known the pirates had broken loose from the cala-boose and recaptured the sealer, even the relief of escaping from that terrible ice-field would not have brought about their present confidence in the successful prosecution of their gold hunting.

They had left the ice behind them. Even isolated floes were absent. On the forenoon of the second day after reaching clear water, Tom Long, who was busy forward, suddenly let out a long drawn howl:

“Land ho!”

It was low ground, eight or nine miles directly in front of the bowsprit of the *Gracie*. It was dismal, and bare of vegetation.

Floyd and Kennedy turned with elated faces to Captain Pete:

"I have been expecting it for an hour or so," said he. "If it hadn't been for the murkiness we'd have seen it before. As nearly as I can figure we are striking the coast between the two main outlets of the river. We will take the northern mouth which is not far distant from St. Michael. There is a navigable channel where vessels of greater draft than ours find no difficulty in entering. I suppose we should have a pilot, and it's possible we may pick up some Indian or Esquimau, or wandering white man."

In an hour they came in plain view of the delta. It did not look as any of them expected. A broad sand-flat at least twenty miles wide extended between low, tundra-covered banks to the north and south. In places the sand glistened in the sun barely covered with water. In others there seemed considerable depth and no current to speak of. Half a dozen streams of varying width seemed to be the main agents in carrying the flood from the mighty Yukon into the sea. The most promising was at least three hundred feet across, and the turbid greenness of the water indicated considerable depth. It was nevertheless a tortuous stream which wandered here and there, from one bank to the other over the whole delta, and offered puzzling problems to the navigator unacquainted with its intricacies.

There remained only a ton of coal in the *Gracie's* bunker. The river banks on both sides were bare of trees or even shrubbery, and as far as they could see the land consisted of tundra. This is a thick, heavy moss, covering the surface of the soil in western Alaska to a depth of two and three feet. It was an absurdity to think of sailing against the current raging down from the parent stream. Pete communicated his quandary to the others and Ah Fat pointed out a little island some half a mile up stream. A mass of drift wood had been cast ashore on this spot. It was a mass of tangle consisting of roots and branches interspersed with the water-soaked trunks of trees that had been washed away from the banks further in the interior by the spring freshets.

"Get out your cross-cut saws!" commanded Pete. "We're going to wood up."

The *Gracie* was turned into the channel. The lad conned her with anxious care. The current ran about five miles an hour, but he selected the more sluggish waters, and finally arrived at the spot for which he aimed. A light grappling anchor was cast overboard. Long Tom leaped into the water after it, and carrying it to the beach sank its fluke deep into the gravel. The water came to their arm-pits as they waded ashore, and the power of the current almost tore them from their feet, but they held their axes and saws above their heads, and succeeded in reaching the timber.

This work suited Floyd, who was an expert logger. None of the others had much practical knowledge, and the rancher took charge of the gang. They cleared away the tangle with their axes until they could work to advantage. Floyd had his eye on a birch trunk several feet in diameter. When this was uncovered he made his men saw it into three-foot lengths. While they were occupied with the task, he returned to the *Gracie*. He came ashore again with a heavy beetle and a number of iron wedges. In an incredibly short time he split the sections into pieces available for the furnace of the tug. They found it difficult to get the wood on board through the strong current and deep water, and Floyd finally made the cordwood into a raft, and hauled it off by a rope to the vessel. The birch trunk had been water-soaked during its long submergence, but the rancher said it had partially dried out, and would make steam nearly as well as coal.

Fighting their way up stream was slow work, and kept every one busy. There was plenty of water for the *Gracie*, for Pete had removed his "detachable keel," but where it was deepest the current was usually the swiftest, and occasionally boulders in the stream made a keen lookout imperative. At times the channel contracted to a width scarcely permitting the converted tug boat to wriggle her tortuous way through the passage. At other places it was wide and deep, and the water

foamed down with all the force of its mighty parent behind it.

It was now midnight, although the Arctic sun still illumined the sky, and all hands had been working to their full capacity during the past ten hours. When they had gained a distance of about twenty miles to the westward they came to a point where another stream, running north, was discovered. Beyond this their course lay wide and unobstructed before them. An opportune bar projecting from the shore just beyond the confluence of the two streams formed a quiet, little harbor, into which Pete steered the *Gracie*. The anchor was dropped overboard, the fire banked, and all hands turned into their bunks for a much needed rest.

CHAPTER XV

THE LOSS OF THE DRAGON'S FANG, AND A PLOT TO REPLACE HER

IN the meantime the *Dragon's Fang* was not making so good weather of it. Captain Senkil's surmise had been correct. It *was* the sealing schooner whose masts he had seen outlined against the sky. Lee Sing and Wong were in the best of humor over their escape. They felt there was only one course to pursue, and that was straight to the Yukon River, even if they had to make their way through or over the ice. Lee Sing did not hesitate when he found a channel leading into the pack. He had a fair wind, and recklessly pressed the *Dragon's Fang* into the very midst of the frozen fastness. As he had expected, the opening closed behind him, and they were prisoners. Their position would have been dangerous and perplexing enough, even if they had been equipped with steam power, but without they drifted helplessly.

Lee Sing and Wong were skillful sailors, and through previous experience somewhat acquainted with the conditions surrounding them, but both felt they had very little choice in the matter of the path to liberty, and either would have perished in the

frozen sea rather than have met the fate that threatened them if again captured by the American officer. As long as they remained in the ice, they were absolutely safe from pursuit. Sooner or later, in the course of ten or fifteen days, they knew they would emerge somewhere if their bottom had not been stoven in before that event.

Under Lee Sing's directions, Wong manufactured a number of heavy rope-fenders, and a sharp lookout was kept to discover the proximity of any dangerous cake of ice. Time and again when such an one threatened destruction, the clever rascals lowered the fenders in time to avert disaster. It was heart-breaking work, but the pirate and his mate fought the elements with a gallantry worthy of a better cause.

Lacking steam power, they were unable to follow the occasional channels which opened in the line of their destination. They attempted to make their way under canvas, but the passages were too narrow. The peril of running against one of the larger cakes was so great, and the consequences would be so disastrous that they concluded the hazard was too much against them. Nevertheless, by constant and watchful care, they managed to hold on without catastrophe.

The *Dragon's Fang* entered the ice field near the Pribilof Islands, two days after the *Gracie* had gone into the pack to rescue Ah Fat. The pirates must have drifted almost directly towards the

coast of Alaska. In spite of Captain Pete's anxious seamanship and the steam power of the *Gracie*, the *Dragon's Fangers* found themselves on the edge of the ice a few miles south of the latitude of St. Michael on the evening of the same day that Captain Pete had entered the delta. The astonishing good fortune which had carried Lee Sing so far on his way now seemed all at once to desert him. In the fury of the same storm which had lashed the ice into tumult as Captain Pete emerged, the Chinamen met their downfall.

A thick, triangular cake, some fifteen feet across, was washed by the turbulent waves alongside of the sealer. Wong was promptly on hand with rope fender to interpose between it and the sealer's side, but an unforeseen casualty set their precautions at naught. The floe extended eight or nine feet in the air, and probably forty below the surface. As Wong with his crew leaned over the side, manœuvring the fender to receive the impact, the floe suddenly began to turn end for end in the water. As the lower part came swishing through the brine, the sailors let go of the fender and fell back in terror. Wong's voice was raised in sudden command, and Lee Sing sprang to the spot. At the same moment the great cake completed its revolution, its weight making the upturn of the lower point of ice irresistible. It struck fairly across the bottom of the sealer amidships, and

cracked its stem as if the solid timbers had been made of pipe clay.

The stricken schooner shivered like a strong man struck with sudden death, reeled drunkenly, and began to settle. Lee Sing and his mate saw at a glance that the damage was irremediable. Two stoutly-built dories, which they had used in their sealing operations, were on the deck forward. They launched them one after the other. There was no time to provision them. The *Dragon's Fang* lurched from side to side, and sank foot by foot until her decks were awash. With a cry of warning, Lee Sing and Wong, who each headed a boat, pushed off to a safe distance before the final catastrophe. The little vessel wallowed a moment, a quiver ran through her oak frame, and with a sullen plunge she dove head-first into the depths of the Bering Sea.

Lee Sing, with Scar-faced Jake, and Ah Tan, one of the Chinese crew, occupied the first dory, and Wong, with Todd and Chow, the other Chinaman, were in the second. As they tossed in the widening ripple, Lee Sing beckoned Wong to come nearer. He had kept his position by dead reckoning, and was, therefore, aware he must be near the coast, and probably within fifteen or twenty miles of one of the mouths of the Yukon.

On the whole, the indomitable pirate chief was not greatly cast down by the foundering of the

schooner, for, as he pointed out to his mate, it had brought them almost to their destination. Furthermore, possession of the craft was dangerous, as it was liable to be discovered they had stolen it. They would not only lose it in that case, but have to pay the penalty. It had disappeared now, and could not be brought in evidence against them. The pirate chief had foreseen that they could not ascend the Yukon River in it, against the rapid current.

"After all, Old Wong," he said, "we have been in worse predicaments than our present one."

"Nothing to eat!" remarked Wong suggestively.

"Pooh!" said the chief. "Five hours' rowing will bring us to the shore. It's not the first time we have hunted food along the beach."

"No fire arms," reminded the mate, "or weapons of any kind."

"If we meet white barbarians, we'll take theirs," said the pirate. "Who knows! We may run across the *Gracie*."

This possibility made Wong show his fangs in a fierce grin:

"I'd like to meet that big dog again," he answered.

"And I'd enjoy dealing with them all in some of the ways that you and I handled our prisoners in the time when our names were a terror throughout the southern seas."

A heavy fog settled down as they talked, and Lee

Sing ordered Wong to hitch on to the first dory tandem-wise. He carried a pocket compass, so they laid their course for the shore. The blanket of vapor settled down thicker, and when the rain drops came pelting through it, it made their progress anything but pleasant. Those in the first boat could not see the second, and only the occasional jerk of the short warp by which they were attached gave evidence of their neighbors. The men bent doggedly to the oars, but as the hours passed, worn out by the exhausting labor that had preceded this demand upon their powers, they began to succumb to the strain. Todd was the first to give up. Wong had noted his weakness, and saw it was useless to drive the man beyond his strength. The mate took his place, and the boats again forged ahead at their former pace.

The fog was so thick that the first intimation of their nearness to the shore was when the foremost dory's nose struck the sand. The cramped men would have thrown themselves upon the ground to rest, but their superiors forced them to pull the boats safely out of the water before they allowed them to relax their efforts.

After a little the pirate led the way to a point back of the beach line, and set the men to collecting drift wood. Wong had a flint and steel, and box of tinder, and soon kindled a cheerful blaze. They heaped on wood until the flames shot up in the air, and warmed their chilled bones. As soon

as Wong was dry and warm he began to long for something to eat, and with Lee Sing's consent he started along the shore on a voyage of discovery. Half a mile above, he found several kayaks hauled beyond the water. This indicated a native settlement, and a short search revealed a number of native huts nearby. Smoke was coming out of some of them, and when he knocked at an entrance, a fat, black-haired Esquimau woman made her appearance.

The looks of the Chinaman did not inspire confidence, for she gave a frightened yell when he attempted to step inside. Half a dozen men came running from the neighboring igloos. It is probable the Esquimau had never seen a Chinaman before, and Wong wore the costume of his country. White men were not unknown to them, but this strangely attired man, with evil face, was a new experience. These natives are a kindly and gentle race, and although not prepossessed in favor of their visitor, they were not disposed to do him any harm on learning his errand was not hostile. By means of signs the newcomer managed to inform them he was in need of food. This appeal struck home to the natives, for hospitality was their first and most binding law. In a moment they laid a huge fish before him, and when he made them understand that he had companions in misfortune, shipwrecked, further down the beach, a deputa-

tion laden with native provisions started back with him to the camp.

They had frying pans, and cooking pots, and promptly prepared a hot meal for the strangers. The leader of the Esquimaux was questioned by Lee Sing, who learned St. Michaels was only forty or fifty miles distant, and that the Yukon River entered the Bering Sea about ten miles to the southward. The pirate chief inquired if any white settlement were nearer than St. Michaels and was answered in the negative.

"Small parties of traders, however, were constantly passing in and out of the river." In fact, the native said, "one of the men of their village had seen a small steam boat pass through the mouth of the delta that day!"

The pirate chief called to Wong, and when the native saw how interested they were, he sent a messenger to the village to summon the fisherman who had viewed the steamer. This man described the vessel, and at the end of their conversation Wong and he were convinced that the stranger was none other than the *Gracie*, and that she could not have reached the main stream since being seen by the Esquimau.

This point settled, Lee Sing was curious to know if the natives possessed fire arms. He had already conceived the project of following our gold miners in his dories, and after overpowering them

to take the steamer to Blondin's creek. To be sure he had given the sketch to Captain Pete in Unalaska, but he remembered every detail, and had no doubt of his ability to find the spot. If the vessel should not turn out to be the *Gracie*, they would nevertheless capture, and use her for their own purposes, though Lee Sing and Wong preferred that the members of the "Yellowbird Gold Mining Company" might prove the victims of the foray. It turned out the peaceable natives had no offensive weapons of any kind. The pirate was disappointed, but depended on the surprise of a sudden attack to accomplish his purpose.

Ib-won, the native, offered to accompany them to the river, and show them how to cut across the delta in their small boats so as to enter the main stream above its confluence with the southern fork. This tallied with the plans of the pirate. The steamer would have to follow the deeper channel, and could not advance faster than two or three miles an hour, and Lee Sing believed they could overtake her in a short time. They started after they had finished their meal, and a short pull brought them to the place the *Gracie* had entered ten hours before. Instead of following the indirect and tortuous stream taken by her, they laid a straight course to the westward.

The pirate chief had a secret store of gold upon his person when the *Dragon's Fang* sank, and with

the lavishness of a freebooter he gave the Esquimaux a couple of pieces before they parted. Ib-won looked alternately at the gold, and at the boats speeding from the shore. His simple mind was not at ease. He had always been an ally and firm friend of the whites. They had treated him with justice and liberality, but this Chinaman and his company did not satisfy Ib-won's instincts. He had never before seen one of this race, and, although it is said by ethnologists that the Esquimaux were of Mongolian extraction, he was not inclined to like them. Somehow, his simple straightforwardness did not seem to meet with equal frankness. Wong's personality was revolting, and the two coolies of the crew were not much better. Ib-won had seen too many white men not to recognize Scar-faced Jake and Todd as a low, and even criminal type.

When the Esquimaux recalled the cruel eagerness which Lee Sing and his mate had displayed on hearing of the little steamer, and the intensity with which they had sought a description of it, he began to fear their intentions were not friendly. He looked again at the gold pieces the pirate chief had thrown him in careless prodigality, but simple as was his intellect he knew the possession of gold did not imply righteousness. Now his mind seized the possibility that these Chinese people were wrong-doers, and he began to seek a way to guard

against any evil his information might have forwarded. It was certain if they intended mischief that it was his duty to prevent it.

Ib-won turned, and made his way rapidly to the left bank of the river. He stopped, and made a small fire from driftwood. When it blazed up, he brought an armful of wet seaweed from the beach, and by skillful manipulation managed to send a series of rapid puffs of smoke straight aloft in the still air. He followed this volley-firing, so to speak, by making one long, dense column rise to the heavens. Then he pulled the sticks apart and extinguished them, knowing he had summoned any of his tribe that happened to be in sight to follow him. He set off, keeping some distance from the river bank, and trotted along rapidly, leaning forward with his body bent from the hips. The men in the boat—if they had been watching—could hardly have seen him, for at a distance the view of his rounded back in his rapid passage resembled that of a wild animal traversing the tundra.

Captain Pete and his party merited a rest, and now they had a chance to repose in security they turned in with the determination to make up for lost time. All but Ah Fat and Dope went below to their bunks. Dope and the Chinaman were good comrades, although neither had an idea of the importance of keeping vigilant watch.

The *Gracie* lay in a nook formed by a sand bar

projecting from the left bank, a half mile beyond where the two forks—as described in the last chapter—united, and formed the main stream of the Yukon. It was at least twenty miles from the sea shore. The parent stream which they had entered was a noble volume of water, eight miles wide, and apparently navigable for vessels of greater draft than the tug, from bank to bank. The channel ran along the opposite shore, and Pete had avoided it with intention. The bar curled like an interrogation point at its outer end, and in this curlycue, about sixty yards from the wooded bank, the *Gracie* was anchored. The bar at the bend of the curlycue was some thirty feet wide, and the swirl of the current had piled up the sand until it formed a rounded bank, twelve feet in height, cutting off—to one standing on the deck of the tug—the view of the stream in the direction of the delta. Ah Fat made a pillow of a coil of rope, and promptly lost all sense of his surroundings. At the end of five or six hours he awoke. Dope was standing near the stern in an attitude of watchfulness that at once attracted the coolie's attention. The dog's head was turned toward the forest fringing the neighboring bank. It consisted of a thick tangle of birch, alder, and spruce, and the trees grew so densely they would have effectually screened an army from observation. The Chinaman had no idea it concealed anything dangerous to the well-

being of the *Gracie's* crew, and was inclined to believe that some wild beast, such as a bear or a deer, was the disturber of Dope's peace of mind.

Suddenly the mastiff grew more alert, and he raised his head with a faint repressed whimper, as he had been taught to warn his friends of the approach of anything suspicious. A moment later, something broke through the thicket, and the Chinaman caught a glimpse of a furry garment. Suddenly Dope whirled sharply around, and rushed to the side of the deck opposite the sand bank on the inner hook of the bar. He placed his forepaws on the rail, and attempted to look over. This time his warning whimper was half snarl, as if he had caught an odor of which he disapproved. Ah Fat was still gazing at the object he saw dimly in the woods, but his ear caught the sound of an oar striking a metal row lock. It was evident that the boat from which the sound came was some distance away, and in any case it did not strike the coolie as a matter of great significance that a row boat should overtake them.

He turned his gaze back to the forest, and saw an Esquimau, clothed in a fur parka, come out on the bank. This man paused when he had a full view of Ah Fat, who was clothed in the conventional Mongolian costume, hesitated a moment, and then came forward with a gesture unmistakably friendly. Something of urgency in the man-

ner of the new-comer apprised Ah Fat that his errand was of importance, and being a quick-witted fellow, he immediately connected it with the approaching boat.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PIRATES ATTACK THE GRACIE, AND ARE REPULSED

A H FAT concluded events were coming along too rapidly for him to handle on his own responsibility. He ran to the companionway, and called down. Pete and Joe Floyd answered the summons instantly, and a moment after the rest followed.

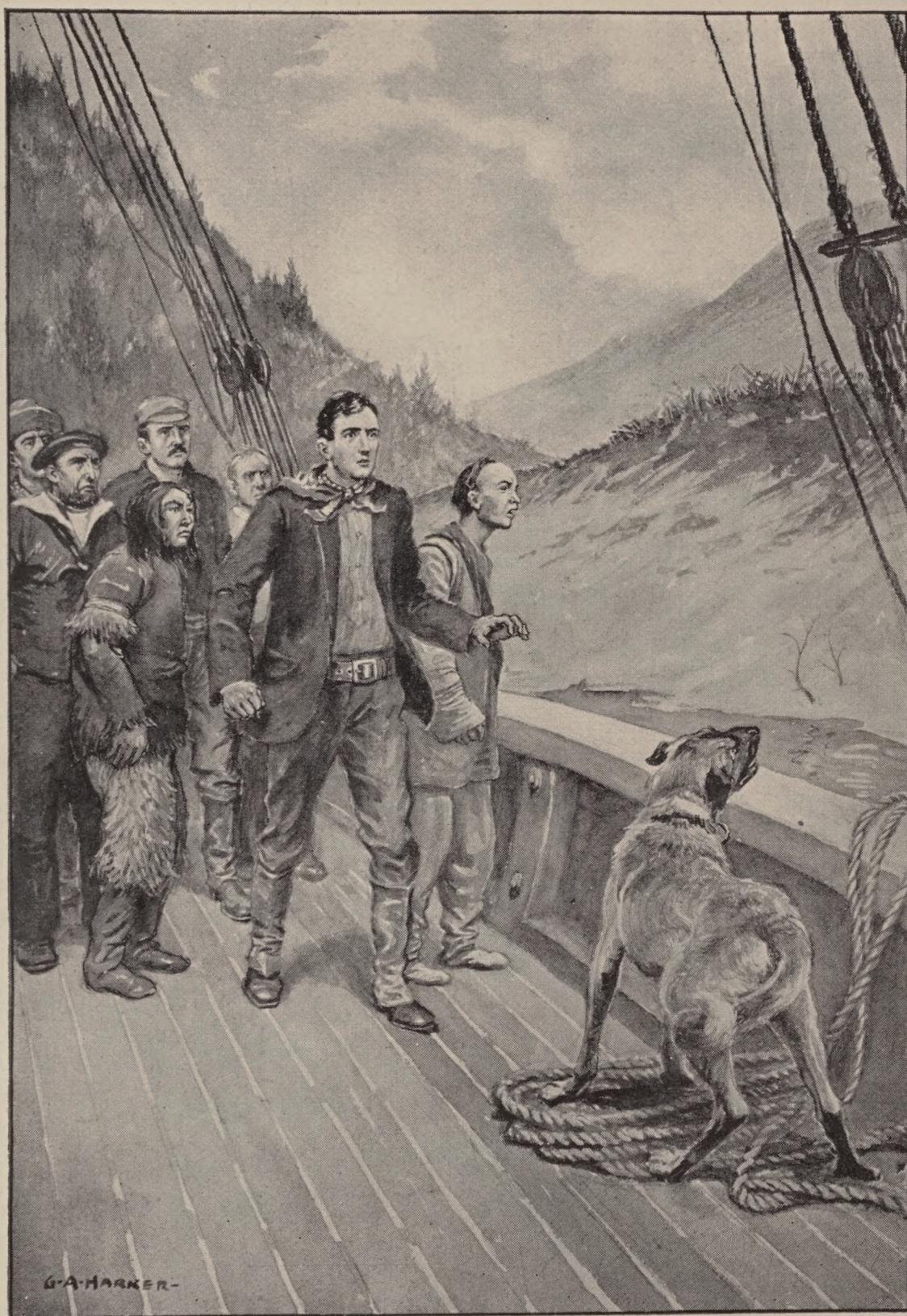
By this time, the Esquimau—Ib-won, of course—was on the sand spit. He called to Pete in broken English that he wanted to come aboard, and his voice and gestures indicated haste. Pete dropped in the skiff, and shoved it ashore.

“Quick! Quick!” exclaimed the native. “Bad man come! I think—bad!”

The lad saw his visitor was greatly excited, and thought the quickest way to find out what he wanted was to follow directions. In a moment they were back on board. Ib-won’s first words were:

“You got guns? Maybe need ’em!”

At this moment Dope reared his head above the side of the vessel, and barked with a challenging



"SOMETHING 'S WRONG!" PETE EXCLAIMED

menace that indicated he knew what he was talking about.

"Something's wrong," Pete exclaimed.

Kennedy ran to the wheel-house, and unlocked the doors of an arm rack containing his own Stevens and two Winchester rifles of the latest pattern. The filled cartridge belts hung over the muzzles. He handed a Winchester to Floyd and Pete, and popped a cartridge into the barrel of his own with a smile of satisfaction.

"We're ready for trouble," he remarked.

By this time Pete had got enough of Ib-won's story to understand that some men were following him in two boats, and the native feared they meant mischief. In his labored explanation, he pointed to Ah Fat, and said:

"Four—yellow, like him. Two—white men!"

Floyd pulled down his trigger guard abruptly, and shot a cartridge from the magazine to the barrel. Then, as he met the glances of the other two, he drawled:

"I reckon them *Dragon Fang* fellers have got out of the calaboose!"

Pete stepped into the boat, rifle in hand, and his friends followed him. At the foot of the little sand elevation, he said:

"Keep back till I take a look!"

He threw himself at full length on the sand, and peered over the top. The dories containing the

pirate crew were there, and had drawn together for a consultation at a hundred yards' distance. The spars of the *Gracie* were plainly perceptible to them, and they had been approaching under the impression that the white barbarians were sleeping without watch. But the excited bay of the mastiff had reached their ears, and caused them to draw together in conference.

Pete had hardly been able to credit the suggestion of the Esquimaux' warning, although Joe Floyd's exclamation had gone straight to the core of the matter. Now he divined what must have happened to bring the pirates to this spot, as well as their intentions. He whispered Kennedy and Floyd to peek over the brow of the bank, and while they were softly swearing at the sight that met their eyes, he thought quick and hard.

In the first place, the pirates were foiled in their evident purpose to surprise them. He did not know that the *Dragon's Fang* had foundered, and that Lee Sing and his crew were unarmed. If he had fully comprehended their utter desperation, he would not have been surprised at this recklessness, but after all, if they made the attack now it could only result in defeat. The lad desired to avoid bloodshed, although it was desirable to give their enemies a lesson that would make them wary of attempting mischief in future. He whispered to his companions:

"Bring your rifles to bear on them, and if they

raise a weapon—shoot. I am going to have a talk with Lee Sing.”

Kennedy and Floyd obediently thrust the muzzles of their Winchesters over the bank, and cuddled the butts to their cheeks.

“I got Lee Sing square over the heart!” breathed the ex-revenue officer, “and it wouldn’t take but mighty little to make me crook my finger.”

“Wong won’t never trouble Dope no more if you say the word,” drawled Joe.

Captain Pete stepped forward, in full view of the pirates. There was a chorus of exclamations, and only Lee Sing was apparently unmoved. He gazed at our hero with a smile, and in an instant changed his plan of action. In spite of his alertness of mind, there were two things on which he was unable to calculate. He did not know the *Gracie* had rescued Ah Fat, or that Ib-won had been shrewd enough to suspect him of evil intention against the steamer. The captain of the pirates supposed he was taking up his relations with Pete at the point where he had seemingly done the “Yellowbird Gold Mining Company” a favor by handing over the Blondin map. So he began:

“I am glad to meet you, Captain Gaignic. You were good enough to offer me help in Unalaska, and now I am in need of your aid. The ice knocked a hole in the bottom of the *Dragon’s Fang*, and she has gone to the bottom. We barely escaped in the dories. We have neither food nor

extra clothing. When we saw the masts of your vessel on the other side of the sand bar we came in all haste—though not knowing it was the *Gracie*—to ask food and assistance.”

Pete was sure this plausible story contained a portion of the truth. It explained their presence, which was more than he had been able to gather from the hurried tale of the Esquimau. Kennedy and Floyd were invisible to the pirate crew. The lad began to suspect that the Chinaman had no fire arms. If they had been armed Lee Sing would have talked differently, or attempted to hold him up at the muzzle of a gun. He had left his own rifle at the foot of the mound, and they could not divine that they were covered by men who seldom missed their aim. Though he wished to avoid actual conflict, he was not disposed to admit the rascals to terms of intimacy. It was safer to keep them at a distance, and how to do this without bringing on open war puzzled him. He saw that Lee Sing's speech was designed to avoid rupture, and read between its lines the pirates' purpose to attack them under the mask of friendliness. This must be forestalled at all events. He turned and called down to the tug.

“Ah Fat, come here, and bring that Esquimau with you!”

He stood in silence a moment, the pirate chief awaiting his answer. Then the coolie and Ib-won took their places at his side. At their appearance,

a shout of wonder went up from the dories. The apparition was distasteful as unexpected to Lee Sing. He realized that further deception was out of the question, and understood—for the first time—that in the boy captain of the *Gracie* he had an opponent worthy of his steel. Pete lifted his hand, and his voice rang trenchantly over the intervening water:

“Lee Sing, the presence of these two men will tell you that I know your purpose. My friends do not want you on the *Gracie*. If you come in our neighborhood, you do so at your peril.”

In response to a signal of the pirate chief the men in both boats began to pull furiously toward the boy. He had anticipated some such *denouement*, and said quietly to Kennedy and Floyd:

“Don’t shoot *at* them! Crack one of the oar blades in each boat if you can.”

A breath later two spurts of smoke were followed by the whiplike cracks of the rifles. The oar Scar-faced Jake was pulling quivered as a bullet struck it. The impact discovered some imperfection in the grain, the wood fibers parted, and a crevice opened to the thin end of the blade. Chow, the scowling Mongolian who pulled the forward oar in Wong’s boat, was even more unlucky. Joe Floyd, who could shoot out a squirrel’s eye at a hundred yards, drilled the small part of the loom of the oar—the round portion joining the fan-shaped blade. The old woodsman bored the hole

just where the oar could least withstand injury. Despite the jar to his hands, the stubborn pirate continued his stroke, but as his weight came on the maimed wood, it broke off at the point of perforation, and left him gazing blankly at the shaft in his grasp, while the oar blade drifted away with the rapid current.

Pete looked on quietly. The coolie and Esquimaux had at first showed signs of panic when the pirates started on their dash. Now they smiled with naive and childlike delight at the discomfiture of the enemy. Floyd and Kennedy pushed their faces, illumined with broad grins, over the top of the bank to gloat at the effect of their volley. It caused confusion and uproar among the pirate crew. Lee Sing and Wong kept their heads, but the sailors promptly decided that this was an unhealthy locality, and, in spite of the expostulation of the officers, made off down the swift current.

The shooting brought Long Tom and Jimmy to the scene, and all watched the retreat of the pirates with joy. Pete's countenance remained grave. The responsibility made him look deeper than the triumph of the moment, and he realized how unfortunate it was that these men had escaped from the custody of Captain Senkil. There was no law on the Yukon to protect them from these marauders, and the balance of their journey up the great river to Blondin's creek would be constantly men-

aced by this band of wolves hanging on their footsteps.

"I don't like this commencement," he said gloomily to Kennedy and Floyd. "Perhaps it would have been wiser to have permitted them to make the attack. Then we could have shot Lee Sing, and Wong, and the rest would have been harmless."

"'Tain't too late yet," drawled Floyd, levelling his Winchester. "Say the word!"

Kennedy's rifle sprang to his shoulder like lightning, and he drew a bead on the pirate mate. For a second the young leader hesitated, then he drew a long breath, and snapped his jaw down:

"No!" he said sharply. "It's not right—except in self defense. We're not outlaws—if they are!"

"Bad yellow man no got gun," supplemented Ib-won, overhearing this remark. "Tried buy at my village!"

"If any are laying around loose they won't be long getting 'em," commented the revenue officer.

"We won't never git so good a chance at 'em again!" summed up the rancher sorrowfully.

"I'm afraid you're right," Pete was forced to agree.

While they were discussing the adventure, an eldritch screech from the woods hard by made the white men jump for their guns. Ib-won laughed, and answered with half a dozen yelps in a different

key. The others saw there was no cause for alarm, and awaited the result. In a moment three Esquimaux broke through the underbrush, and seeing their countryman, came fearlessly down to the tug. Ib-won explained that when he had set out to warn the whites of the evil purposes of the yellow men he had summoned his band by smoke signal to follow his trail, in case of possible trouble.

It occurred to Pete that Ib-won would be a desirable man to accompany them on their up-river trip, and Kennedy and Floyd approved of the idea. He found Ib-won more than willing to join them, for these natives have the itch for travel in their blood, and are nomads from birth. When Pete offered him a small monthly stipend, he accepted with delight, and said he knew the river, and could so guide the *Gracie* as to overcome the obstacles to her ascent, and promised to keep a keen lookout that the "hateful yellow men" did not surprise them. When he told his countrymen, it was apparent they envied him his good luck. Pete presented him with some gewgaws, and a store of sugar and hard tack to give his friends. He distributed them with royal good will, and sent the natives on their homeward journey in high spirits.

Before they made a start, Ib-won explained in his broken English that he would like to scout back, and see whether the yellow men intended to go down to the mouth of the river. Pete thought it possible that after the lesson they had received,

they might decide to return along the shore to St. Michaels. Having money, they could refit, and take up the trail in a better craft, and equipped with arms.

The native disappeared in the thicket with the stealth of a beast of prey, and the Gracie people awaited his return with curiosity. In an hour he came back and reported that two of the yellow men were fishing, and while the one they called Wong was shaping two oars from a spruce sapling with a small hatchet,¹ the leader and Wong, he said, were talking earnestly as the latter worked. The two evil white men, as Ib-won characterised Scar-faced Jake and Todd, kept apart from the others. None of them showed any inclination to leave the camp for the present.

¹ Fishing tackle and a hatchet were part of the boat's equipment, and were in them when the dories were launched from the deck of the sinking *Dragon's Fang*.

CHAPTER XVII

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE SCAR-FACED MAN AND TODD—A NIGHT ATTACK

IF Ib-won had been able to understand the conversation between Lee Sing and Wong, he would have had something of more interest to report:

“Wong,” the pirate chief was saying, “we will take up our old trade. There is only one chance left us. We must cut the throats of those barbarians, and take their boat, and the deed must be done soon. Every moment makes it harder. They will be out of reach. We have no food, and, lastly, these two white dogs, Jake and Todd, will soon make us trouble. They are no longer under control, and mean to take their own way. Look at them!”

The two “evil white men” were sitting idly on the bank. They amused themselves as they talked by throwing stones at the fishermen. When Ah Tan and Chow remonstrated, they laughed insolently, and mimicked their shrill, expostulating voices. Wong viewed them with a somber glare in his black eyes as he replied:

“Yes, Highness, I see. Now that the schooner is sunk, we need them no more.”

Lee Sing accepted this concise assurance without a change in the smile to which his features seemed naturally moulded. He knew his mate, and understood that the lives of the insubordinate sailors were not worth a pinch of tobacco. He passed over the matter as settled, and continued:

"We must get in advance of that steamer, and waylay her before another twenty-four hours have passed. And—" he turned back to Scar-faced Jake and Todd—"You are right! We need them no more. Do as you will, but be ready to start in the boats with our own countrymen by the time the twilight sets in. It is short in these latitudes."

Wong nodded in comprehension. Between these two old associates in crime few words were necessary. The sun only dipped beneath the horizon for an hour, and even then there remained enough light to temper the darkness. It was this interval the chief referred to. The gloom would enable them to pass ahead of the *Gracie* unobserved. It was six o'clock in the evening, and they had until half past eleven or twelve. Presently, the pirate mate finished making the oar. He cast a glance at his chief, and strolled over to where the white sailors were still reclining.

The river bank was some seven feet high, and as Wong came toward them, the scar-faced man dropped his sheath knife. It struck a smooth stone, rebounded, and fell over the brink on to the beach. Jake exploded in an angry oath, and leaped

down to recover it. At this moment the pirate reached the spot, and looked on him from above. Todd was ten feet distant. These two men had been concerting plans of their own while the leader of the pirates and Wong were conspiring, and Jake being a reckless ruffian, in the vexation of the moment, took the opportunity to notify Wong of their intentions:

“You sawed-off chink!” he said, as he unexpectedly gazed up into the eyes of the man who had disciplined him sharply during the voyage from Victoria, “Todd an’ me is goin’ to quit this outfit to-day, an’ we’re goin’ to take one of them dories when we go.”

Wong had approached the spot predisposed to murder, and this sudden defiance was a lash that incited him to instant action. A heavy boulder lay at his feet. He lifted it as if it had been a feather, and cast it down upon the other. It hit the scar-faced one, who was looking upwards and had his head thrown back, squarely on the breast, and the unfortunate man crumpled beneath its weight like a pillow struck with a club. It happened so swiftly, and the accomplishment of the pirate’s purpose was so complete, that the victim did not even have time to groan before he was dead, his life beaten out in that second of time.

Wong turned toward the second sailor with the alertness of a wild beast, but Todd had seen the blow and its terrible effect. He was not a timid

miscreant, but the sudden wiping out of his partner was too much for his nerves. He let out a yell that rang far over the water, leaped for the beach, and ran swiftly to where one of the dories lay half afloat. With strength quadrupled by his terror he put his shoulder to the stern and pushed it into deep water. As it glided away from the shore he cast himself in, and rowed with all his might down stream. Wong threw a cobblestone as large as a brick after him with such accuracy that it struck Todd's knee, and shattered the bone as if it had been a pipe stem. He uttered a shriek of agony, but stubbornly clung to the oars, and redoubled his efforts to escape.

By this time Lee Sing had come to the bank. He merely glanced at the maimed form of Scar-faced Jake beneath the heavy stone, and fixed his eyes keenly on the man in the boat. His sharp gaze discerned that the frenzied efforts were weakening second by second as the strength oozed out of Todd's tortured body. Then he smiled slightly, and said quietly to his mate:

"It is well done, Old Wong. You have got both birds. Take the other dory, and follow. The barbarian will drop from his seat soon. Throw him in the water, and bring the boat back."

The event fell out as Lee Sing predicted. By the time the second boat overtook him, not many minutes later, Todd's oar had dropped from his nerveless hands, and he had fallen off the thwart in a

swoon. Wong seized him by the collar, and with scarcely an effort of his strong arm lifted the senseless body over the side and let it sink in the icy water. He gave a grunt of satisfaction, and secured the painter to the stern of his own dory. Then he pulled to the shore without so much as a glance to see if the body of his victim had disappeared. The two Chinese sailors met him as he brought the boats to within a few feet of where Jake lay, and assisted him to drag them out of the water. Then they all went back to the camp fire, and cooked the fish they had caught, and ate their dinner without any perceptible diminution of appetite on account of the incidents I have related.

When the *Gracie* hauled out of her berth a moderate breeze was blowing. They found the Yukon to be a wide stream at this point. The right bank was low and the country back of it level, and covered with spruce, and birch and alder. The current ran swiftly, and in combination with the head wind made the progress of the steamer slow and toilsome beside using up fuel at an alarming rate.

The breeze steadily increased, and before ten miles were passed it became a hurricane, raising waves five or six feet high and whipping their crests into foam. The storm caught the *Gracie* on the right or unsheltered bank. There seemed to be no place along the shore where they could get out of the force of the gale or the accelerated current of the river. At last Pete was forced to cross the

raging stream to seek more favorable conditions on the opposite side. When he exposed the full length of the little vessel to the fury of the wind it seemed to lift her fairly out of the water, and carried her down stream at a rate that startled him. Nevertheless she was a staunch craft, and built to contend with heavy weather. He headed up the river, and kept her quartering for the wooded banks on the opposite side.

They were swept down several miles before they succeeded in crossing. The young captain discovered a rocky headland projecting a hundred yards into the water, and tried to fight his way into its lee, but found a long sand spit projected from the end of the point down the river. He headed up inside of this—where he saw still water. He was entering the haven when an unexpected gust caught the *Gracie*, and whirled her out of her course. Her engines were racing at full speed, and she buried her nose in the bar with a shock that almost tore her timbers apart. The stern lay in deep water, and was partially protected from the strength of the blast.

When the power was shut off the stubby bowsprit projected ten feet over the sand, and Pete and Kennedy leaped down. The bow of the tug had burrowed deep into the yellow sand, and seemed immovably fixed. An examination of the engine and hull assured them that nothing had been broken or jarred out of place by the shock, but the gale

was blowing harder than ever. It tore through the forest above them felling trees and hurling branches through the air with a clatter that made them thank their stars they had gained even the incomplete shelter of the bar. The *Gracie* was head on to the wind, and they agreed that nothing could be done until it abated.

Pete put out the kedge as a measure of precaution, and they retired to the cabin, and listened to the blast howling above them. It continued for some hours, and gradually diminished in force. As they were about to congratulate themselves that the storm was over, it suddenly began again and blew harder than ever. All that day and a part of the next they huddled around the stove in the cabin for it had become piercingly cold. Thirty-six hours after they struck the sandbar it dropped to a dead calm, and the sun forced its way through the clouds, and cheered the hearts of the shipwrecked company.

Pete lowered the small boat, and paddled around the *Gracie*. Floyd went with him, and they found she had run up on a shelf of loose, yellow sand. Two-thirds of her length was clear, and floated in water ten or fifteen feet in depth. They were lying on the inner edge of a crescent formed by the headland projecting from the shore, and the sand bar leading down the river from its end. This formed a small harbor a hundred yards in depth. Pete had brought a lead and as Floyd pulled him about

he made sure there was plenty of water in which to turn the tug around when she was extricated from her uncongenial berth in the sand.

Under the young leader's directions they dug a deep trench on each side of the bow until they uncovered the tug's stem. Further aft the water began to pour in, and it became a case for rubber boots. When they could no longer dig to advantage their efforts had resulted in so far aiding the *Gracie* that she almost floated at the head. However, as Kennedy pointed out "almost" was as bad as nothing if they could not haul her into deep water. Long Tom smiled and permitted himself to say in his prim, man-of-war style:

"I think, sir, Captain Pete knows he can kedge her off."

Pete smiled, and acknowledged that such was his intention. The kedge anchor, weighing about two hundred pounds, was ferried out a hundred feet or more from the stern. Here they dumped it, and carried the line back on board. Then all hands tailed on the rope. Long Tom had hold in front, and started one of the sailor *chanteys* used on board ship to mark time for the men when pulling on a heavy drag:

"Oh, Boney was a warrior!
Oh, ho! Oh, ho!"

They all surged madly with their weight on the cable when they came to the "Oh, ho! Oh, ho!" and

they felt the *Gracie* quiver. Then a grating craunch ran along her keel, and she slipped a foot or two backward into deep water:

“A warrior, a tarrier!
John, prance along!!!”

When he came to “John, prance along,” the *chantey* man bent his back with every ounce of power in him, and the others followed suit. The warp extending to the kedge hummed like a harp string. Then the *Gracie* started as if life blood had been injected in her veins, and slipped over the sand into the deep water at the edge of the bar.

By the time they had floated their craft the sun was dipping, and murky clouds banked in the sky until it was almost black. Pete said to Kennedy and Floyd:

“What’s the program? Shall we get the anchor up and continue our trip, or stop here until we have more light?”

“What’s the hurry?” asked Kennedy.

“I wonder where them pirates are?” drawled the rancher.

“That’s what bothers me,” said Pete. “We are too close to Lee Sing and Wong for either safety or pleasure. This continual anticipation of an attack keeps me in the anxious seat.”

“Well,” interrupted Kennedy. “If that wind caught those Chinks on the river, the chances are we’ve heard the last of them, and even if they got

safe to shore they couldn't have traveled far enough to put us in any danger of an attack. If you think it is best to lay here until the sun comes out again, I don't see any reason why we shouldn't do so."

They agreed and went below to their bunks, for they had not got much sleep during the gale. Dope and Ib-won remained on deck to watch.

The clouds became thicker and deeper. Outside the bar the current rippled, making crisp splashes that were the only sounds disturbing the stillness of night. The *Gracie* swung by a warp about fifty feet long. She drifted to its full length so that her stern was not many feet from the edge of the shingle.

Dope knew Ib-won was an employee of the "Yellowbird Gold Mining Company," but persisted in considering him a harmless variety of wild animal not to be considered in the same class with his master and the other white men. Therefore he stationed himself on the bow which was nearest the sand bar while Ib-won, who—to tell the truth—was more at ease when the mastiff was at a distance, took up his place at the stern which swung in the center of the little harbor.

An hour passed, and the clouds gathered more thickly in the zenith. A breath of heavy vapor rolled in from the river, and was followed by fold after fold of greasy mist until the Arctic night was black as the bottomless pit. The fog deadened the faint splash of water, and dulled Ib-won's and even

the mastiff's faithful ears so they did not discern the ripple caused by a dark mass which separated from the bank, and was gently propelled toward the *Gracie's* stern. It came closer, and resolved itself into a dory paddled by four men with cautious stealth. The Esquimau leaned over the taffrail with his eyes closed. He did not dream of danger from the evil yellow men, and if he had, the gloom was so intense he could not have distinguished their approach.

Now the dory was beneath the stern, and a long arm reached out and seized the rope by which the tug was moored. Wong—for it was he—grasped it more firmly, and took hold with his other hand preparatory to clambering on the deck. The rope quivered slightly, and creaked where it was made fast to a belaying pin in the rail. The Esquimau did not awaken to his danger, but Dope heard the creak, and felt the vibration produced by the weight on the warp. He had been taught by his master to investigate before giving alarm. Instead, therefore, of barking—as most dogs would have done—he padded noiselessly aft to find the reason for the slight disturbance his acute senses had noted. If the air had been dry the noble animal would have already scented the Chinaman. As it was he did not suspect that his master's enemies were so near.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHAT DOPE DID TO THE PIRATES—WONG GOES ADRIFT

THE great mastiff slunk along like a shadow until he came to the taffrail where Ib-won was leaning. His approach was so noiseless that neither the Esquimau on the inside or the pirate mate—now coming up the anchor warp hand over hand—detected his presence. Dope stood for a moment in an attitude of frozen watchfulness like a bird dog on a point.

Wong's body was entirely out of the dory, and he hung suspended at the stern of the *Gracie*. With the strength of a gymnast, and the stealth of a tiger he warily made his way upward. A short heavy club attached by a thong to his waist-belt was his only weapon.

Nearer and nearer with each shift of his hand-grip he moved toward the somnolent Esquimau, although not as yet aware of his presence. Dope had decided that danger was imminent to those whom it was his duty to protect. Still silent as death the mastiff cautiously put his fore paws on the rail, and standing on his hind feet the black mask of his face peered into the gloom below. His

head was merely a darker blot of the night, undiscernible by Wong or the others in the boat.

The pirate was now level with the taffrail. Extending his right arm he reached over the stern and—brought it down on Ib-won's shoulder. He had sought to grasp the inner rail, and hoist himself quietly aboard the vessel. He realized in a flash that instead he was clutching the shoulder of a sleepy watchman. The sudden realization that this incident must cause the failure of his plan to surprise the *Gracie's* company filled his fierce heart with a sudden blaze of anger that for the moment robbed him of his judgment, and made him careless of consequence.

With an inarticulate yell of rage like the snarl of a wild beast, he pulled Ib-won to him, and at the same moment wriggled over the taffrail to the deck. Dope by this time had gained a clear idea of the scope of the attack. Simultaneously with the pirate's cry he leaped upon him. Wong's hands encircled the Esquimau throat, and he was bearing him backward to the deck. Another second would have sealed Ib-won's fate, but the mastiff sprang upon the pirate and fastened his teeth in his brawny back. The powerful dog gave him a desperate shake that tore him loose from the native, and made him for an instant feel like a rat in the jaws of a furious terrier.

Dope had his plan marked out. He did not linger with the Chinaman. Giving him a final shake he

cast him aside, and leaped from the top of the rail into the dory. As he disappeared there was a commotion on board, and Pete burst from the scuttle followed by Floyd and Kennedy. Floyd picked up a lantern as he sprang from his berth, and in a second struck a match and the flame flared up. This made him arrive on the scene a moment later than the others. With the unreasoning directness of a bull dog Kennedy had found his way to Wong. Snatching a belaying pin from the rail he struck the pirate, who was attempting to regain his feet, a blow which sent him back to the deck senseless. Pete was bending over Ib-won who had just begun to realize where he was.

In the hurly burly only Pete missed Dope. A tremendous tumult in the water behind the *Gracie* caused them to congregate at the stern. A second after felling the pirate mate Kennedy, with the readiness of a frontiersman, had sprung to the arm rack inside the wheel house, and lined up alongside of the others with his loaded Steven's in his hand.

It proved to be unnecessary as a means of defense. Old Dope was master of the situation. When the dog sprang into the boat he landed on the sailor Ah Tan and his huge jaws closed upon the unfortunate pirate's wrist. The bone cracked as if it had been a chicken's wing. With a sharp cry of pain and terror he tried to pull away and Dope, with the intelligence of his training, released him and leaped full at Chow's throat. This man sat on the

thwart behind, and further back Lee Sing was in the chocks of the bow. The dog flashed one lightning snap at the sailor which laid his throat open, and continued toward the pirate leader. Lee Sing had a light paddle uplifted in his right hand. But though fearless, he was not the man to engage in an unequal struggle. Instead of awaiting the approach of the mastiff he flung his weapon into his black face. As it happened the point of the paddle struck Dope squarely on the nose, and for a second stopped his onset. Lee Sing took advantage of the opportunity, and dove overboard. Ah Tan had taken to the water in terror, and Chow toppled over the side of the boat after the mastiff gashed him.

Therefore when Pete, and Floyd, and Kennedy peered over the taffrail into the gloom below they discovered Dope to be the sole inmate of the dory. Lee Sing, abandoning the others to their fate, was swimming rapidly and silently to the shore. Ah Tan made as much progress as he could with his one uninjured arm, in his wake. Chow was mortally wounded, and after a faint struggle sunk to the bottom.

Of course Pete and his friends were unable to see these facts as I have told them, and only understood that an attack on the *Gracie* had been successfully repelled through the efforts of the mastiff. They recognized Wong, whom they bound before he regained consciousness, and had seen the sailor Chow sink helplessly out of sight. A rippling efflores-

cence in the water showed where Lee Sing was nearing the shore, but they were not aware that it was the defeated pirate chief. Nearer them Ah Tan floundered and splashed in his painful efforts to escape.

Kennedy raised his rifle, and pointed the muzzle at the latter, but Pete threw up the barrel and said:

"The man is disabled, let him go."

"He'll only die in the bush," remarked Floyd. "An Alaskan forest is no place for a disabled man."

"He'll suffer more than if I put a bullet through his head," remarked the ex-revenue man with some satisfaction, dropping the butt of the gun on the deck.

The next thing on the program was to bring Dope back. Pete and Floyd went after him in the small boat. As they came to the dory, Dope stood on the thwart. He alternately looked at his friends, and wagged his tail furiously, and gazed into the darkness where Lee Sing was wading to the shore, and growled. He was evidently undecided whether it was not his duty to pursue the enemy. When Pete called he gave a parting bark toward the shore, and leaped into the dingy. The young leader was not ashamed to throw his arms around the neck of the noble animal in a warm embrace. Floyd looked down sympathetically, and commented:

"He sure is a wonder! He has done up the whole lot of Chinks, and I can't see that he's got a scratch."

This was not entirely true, for Dope's nose where

it had been hit by the point of the pirate's paddle, was bruised and swollen. Although he had not heeded it in the ardor of the combat it was now apparent that it pained him greatly. Floyd insisted on bathing and bandaging it with tincture of arnica. This friendly attention Dope gratefully accepted although the majestic mastiff looked absurdly ridiculous with the square point of his black muzzle wrapped in white linen.

They had brought the dory with them to the *Gracie*, and tied it under the stern. When the sun rose an hour later the fog rolled away, and the morning dawned with dazzling brilliancy. There was not a breath of wind and the radiant orb of day burned in the blue heaven with unwonted splendor. As it rose higher over the tops of the trees which crowned the bank its smiles were concentrated on the bosom of the little pool in which the vessel lay anchored. Outside in the swift currents of the main stream the turbulent waters were opaque with yellow mud. In the estuary behind the sand bar no current disturbed the still depths. When the sun struck it from above it became translucent, and the little Scotchman exclaimed, pointing with his finger:

"Mon! Look there. Dope has got ane of them!"

On the yellow sand beneath ten feet of water lay the body of Chow the dead pirate. He was on his back, and his arms were extended as in the last

futile struggle. Their anger had departed with the coming of day, and all felt the sadness of the spectacle.

"After all," moralized Pete, "human life is a sacred thing, and I am glad that the blood guilt is on old Dope's soul instead of mine."

"Shake hands, Dope!" exclaimed Kennedy, extending his sturdy fist to the mastiff.

Dope, who sat on his hinder end nearby, solemnly stretched out a huge paw. Kennedy shook it warmly and continued:

"That's all right about the sacredness of human life! But I am glad that fellow instead of Dope is sprawling at the bottom of the river. Talking about souls! Dope's got one all right—which is more than I think the dead man ever had."

Floyd summed up the subject before they turned away:

"Some dogs has souls," said he with his hand on Dope's head. "And some humans hasn't."

"Well," said Pete, "we may as well start for Blondin's creek. But what are we going to do with the pirate we have captured?"

Wong sat near them on the deck with his hands ironed behind him, and tied down to a ringbolt. He was a sturdy villain, and not much the worse for the encounter of the previous night. Dope had chopped a piece of meat as large as a lemon out of his right buttock when he paid his compliments to the marauder before leaping into the boat. Ken-

neddy had laid his scalp open with the belaying pin, but his thick skull was intact. He had not even lost his appetite, for when they gave him his breakfast he fed voraciously. With astonishing oriental impassiveness he seemed to have accepted his fate, and although he displayed no lack of interest in what was passing it was evident he was prepared to accept whatever penalty his captors might impose.

This in truth was a problem that gave them some trouble to solve:

"Let's take him ashore and tie him to a tree," suggested Kennedy.

Joe Floyd shook his head, and Pete said:

"No. That would hardly do, Cap. Lee Sing seems to have escaped with his whole skin, and he is probably watching us now from these woods."

"If he had a gun he'd be shooting!" agreed Kennedy.

"Well," continued Pete, "ten minutes after we got out in the river Lee Sing would have his mate free, and the two would hatch more mischief."

"Sure as you're born," assented the rancher.

"Then, I tell you!" cried Kennedy, who seemed full of ideas in this connection. "We'll bind him hand and foot, and put him in the dory and cast him adrift in the middle of the river. If he's got any luck, maybe he'll fetch up in the Bering Sea—"

"We don't need the dory, anyhow," Floyd said.

"He'd have a chance of being picked up by the

natives," remarked Pete, thoughtfully. "On the whole I believe it's the best thing we can do. We can't put him ashore on account of Lee Sing, and we don't want him with us."

"Not much!" agreed the others.

The wind had fallen until not a breath of air was stirring. Now they got their first experience of a plague with which they were destined to become on intimate terms during the balance of their expedition. They had already noticed the presence of mosquitoes, and the annoying and persistent insects began to appear in myriads as the sun warmed up the air. They saw countless swarms of them buzzing along the edge of the timber, and presently some uncanny instinct made them aware of the presence of their natural prey on board the *Gracie*. They charged on the vessel in such numbers as to fairly put the crew to rout. They ran to the cabin and slammed the door after them, forgetting in their haste that Dope and Wong were left to the tender mercy of the vicious little winged assailants.

The young Captain went to his chest, and throwing aside the things that lay on top, brought out half a dozen face shields that he had bought in Victoria for this emergency. They were little globes of fine netting made to frame the head of the wearer, and fitting closely around the neck so that the pests could not crawl under. As they proceeded to equip themselves with this strange head-gear, they heard

yells of dismay from Wong, and Dope pushed against the cabin door whimpering loudly for his master to come to his relief.

Hastily drawing on gloves they returned to the deck. Dope made a dash past them into the cabin when they opened the door, and they shut him in to recover his equanimity. The pirate was covered so thickly with the tormenting insects that it looked as if the exposed portion of his skin was clothed with a coarse fur. He had closed his eyelids to protect his vision, but the sockets were banked full of the little plagues, each struggling for a chance to thrust its proboscis into his skin in search of blood. They buzzed so furiously about his face that when he had opened his mouth to yell shortly before, hundreds had flown in and almost choked the unfortunate man.

Floyd, in his knowledge of woodcraft, was the first to afford adequate relief from the tormentors. In a jiffy he had gathered the materials for a smudge in a large iron kettle. He lit this, and as the heavy fog of smoke poured out he sprinkled a handful of powdered sulphur he had brought from below on the smoldering embers. The effect was instantaneous. As the reeking blast reached them the insects fell on the deck by millions. Those who did not get the immediate effect of the deadly vapor smelled it from afar, and judiciously kept on the outskirts of the impregnated zone. Joe set the pot between the Chinaman's legs, and the acrid fumes

relieved him from the mosquito nuisance as if by magic. The odor of the tar, and old rope, and sulphur which composed the smudge however, soon made the burly pirate almost long again for the insects. In the few seconds Floyd thought it safe to leave the smudge under his nose his muddy, sallow complexion turned to a cadaverous white, and he became violently sick at his stomach.

Fortunately they had started their fires before the mosquitoes made their appearance in force, and when they came out on the open river the insects disappeared. They discovered later the pests rarely left the shore, and that they were safe from their attacks on the bosom of the water.

When they reached the middle of the broad flood about four miles from either bank, Pete hauled the dory alongside. He cut the ropes that secured Wong's ankles, and led him to the rail:

"We don't want to kill you, Wong," he said to the pirate. "And yet we don't think it safe to let you go entirely free. We'll set you adrift in the dory. It will probably carry you a good distance down the river."

"Wait a moment," interrupted Floyd. "I came near forgetting something!"

He bolted down into the cabin and reappeared with the tin can containing the two halves of the poison ball that had been thrown on board the *Gracie* in Sitka. He tied it around the pirate's bull neck and said:

“Thar! Ef you git hungry—you can tackle that.”

The pirate's face betrayed no emotion as he stepped into the boat. In his stolid way he accepted his predicament as foreordained and inevitable. It never occurred to him to whimper or beg for mercy. These foolish barbarians were even giving him a chance for his life. He knew if he had held Captain Pete in the hollow of his hand—instead of the case being reversed—that he would have shown no such silly soft-heartedness as to permit an enemy to escape alive. Pete met his eyes as the ruthless old marauder turned his gaze upward in a parting glance, and waved his hand in involuntary farewell. Wong spat contemptuously in the water and turned his back on the lad who had conquered him, and failed to exact the uttermost penalty.

CHAPTER XIX

TWO OF PETE'S FRIENDS DIE, AND ONE MAKES HIM
HIS HEIR

WHILE Captain Pete was urging the *Gracie* toward the upper Yukon, things were happening on Puget Sound that were of momentous interest to the young man, and it is necessary to go back several weeks, and relate what has occurred in Port Townsend, and Cortesana.

Captain Pete bade adieu to Grace Hogan in Port Townsend on the twenty-eighth of May. Everything was prosperous with the Collector and his family, or Pete would not have dreamed of going on an expedition which would cut him off from communication with them for a long period. There are times in every life and career when important events tumble headlong over one another, and it appeared that such an interval was happening in Captain Pete's existence. The young man's career had been singularly fortunate in many ways. Although the struggle to rise above the level of his birth was a hard one his life had never been marked by real calamity. Now that he was far beyond reach of those he loved the events we have forecasted began to occur.

While the *Gracie* was in the ice pack of the Bering Sea, about a month after Pete's departure, Collector Hogan was taken down with a heavy cold, and the disease developed into acute pneumonia. The old man's constitution had been a sturdy one, but the hardships endured during three years' service in the War of the Rebellion, and a later generous conviviality had undermined it. Despite solicitous care he only lingered a week, and Grace was left fatherless.

Fortunately Major and Mrs. Fisher had returned from the East, and were in Port Townsend. With the exception of Captain Pete, the Fishers were perhaps the closest friends of the Hogans. Mrs. Fisher was constantly with the bereaved family, and helped them to bear up under the affliction. At Mrs. Hogan's request Major Fisher took hold of her business affairs, which had been left in a somewhat ragged state, and did his best to adjust them to advantage. He found the Collector had not left as large an estate as had been anticipated. Several years before he had speculated largely, and somewhat injudiciously in Puget Sound real estate. A period of business depression had caused many of these investments to go awry. Had it not been for the money paid him by the Government for the foiling of Joe Cloon's great opium conspiracy (as related in Captain Pete of Cortesana) he certainly would not have been able to extricate himself from

his troubles, and the family would have been left penniless.

Major Fisher was able to save from the wreck a sufficient income to the Hogans to maintain them in a modest way. He advised the sale of the costly residence the Collector had erected before his misfortunes overtook him, and that the family take up their lives on a scale more fitting to their present means.

It was natural during this period that Grace's thoughts should turn to her young lover. She knew that if he were aware of the present straits of the family, he would be at her side, and prove a strong and efficient aid. It occurred to her to send him a message, and she consulted Major Fisher on the subject. He agreed that it was desirable Pete should know of the death of his old patron as soon as possible, and of the alteration in the circumstances of the Hogan family.

Pete had written Grace on his departure from Sitka. Owing to the infrequency of the mails, the letter had not reached her until two or three days after her father's death. He told her he might be detained in Unalaska on account of the ice in the Bering Sea. Major Fisher wired Victoria and Seattle, and availed himself of all the maritime resources at his command, but was unable to find a boat on the eve of departure to the extreme North. It was too early in the season for the ordinary traffic

with the Bering Sea to begin, and the disappointing result of his efforts was to discover that an early ship would start from Seattle on the 29th of June bound for Unalaska, and Alaskan ports on the Bering Sea. They wrote by this vessel on the possibility of the *Gracie* still being detained at the Aleutian Islands.

Important as was the bearing of Collector Hogan's death on Captain Pete's affairs an event immediately followed that seemed to equal it in importance. Mr. Hagan, the old real estate dealer and manager of the Origgon Improvement Company's interests at Cortesana, who had been the main instrument in building up Pete's financial standing, was hurried out of the world even more suddenly than Collector Hogan. Mr. Hagan had gone to show an intending purchaser an important tract of land on Deception Pass. He and the capitalist were caught in a tide ripple in a dangerous portion of the Pass, as the current came rushing in from the Pacific Ocean. This body of Puget Sound, Deception Pass, is well known to mariners as being at certain stages of the tide as dangerous as the waters in the bay of Fundy. It was through the accident of an oar being broken in the inexperienced hands of the purchaser that the old real estate dealer was overtaken by the disaster. If he had been alone in the boat, he would probably have succeeded in reaching the shore. As it was, their skiff was overturned in the maelstrom, and the two men

drowned within sight of helpless spectators on the beach. The bodies were recovered the same day, and brought to Cortesana.

Mr. Hagan had laid out the town site, and been one of the principal factors in building the little city to its present status of important prosperity. He was a large property holder, and had money invested in most of its commercial enterprises. The old man had formed few friendships in the city of his adoption. He had given himself entirely to the business side of life, and had never been concerned with the social amenities of the town. Therefore his existence had been a solitary one.

Nothing was known of Mr. Hagan's family. He had lived alone, and those in business connection with him had never heard him mention his personal affairs. Captain Pete had been the only one who seemed to entirely possess the old gentleman's affection and confidence. He was supposed to be a wealthy man, and the disposition of his estate was a matter of much interest to the inhabitants of Cortesana. Speculation was freely indulged in as to his will, although no one knew positively that he had left testamentary papers.

A few days after the funeral it became known that Judge Sharpstein held the last will and testament of George C. Hagan, and that he had devised all his possessions to Peter Graignic, of Cortesana. The estate was valued at nearly half a million of dollars, and was invested in city property of rapidly

increasing value, and prosperous commercial enterprises. As Captain Pete—the Peter Graignic of the testament—was known to be absent on a voyage to Northern Alaska the will could not be probated. Judge Sharpstein thought it expedient to notify the friends of the heir to this princely fortune in order that they might communicate the windfall to him as soon as possible. In fact he felt the presence of the new owner of the property was urgently desirable on account of the necessity for financial supervision of the details of the estate.

So it came about that the old fisherman of Waldron Island and his Indian wife, Captain Pete's father and mother, received a letter from the Cortesana lawyer telling them their oldest son was now one of the wealthy men of the new Northwest. The stirring tidings did not throw the old fisherman off his balance, but he recognized that a man should not be wandering through the northern wilds in constant peril, when his own and other important interests, depended on his presence in Cortesana.

The result of the fisherman's cogitations brought him into Judge Sharpstein's office on "P" Street, a couple of days later, and there he met Major Fisher, who had hurried up from Port Townsend with the same ideas in his mind that had brought the Frenchman from Waldron Island. The lawyer kept them waiting, and the Major and Mr. Graignic had time to discuss the matter. The fisherman now heard for the first time of the death of Collector Hogan,

and the straitened circumstances of his family. He and the Major of course knew Grace and Pete were engaged to be married with the Collector's consent, although he had put them on probation for a period.

Major Fisher did not know the reason of Pete's northern journey, and Mr. Graignic had pledged himself not to divulge the discovery of the placer mine at Blondin's creek. Therefore he, more than the others, realized the difficulty of getting into communication with his son. Sharpstein agreed with them that it was extremely desirable Pete should receive the news of his accession to fortune, and of Collector Hogan's death, at as early a date as could be managed. If they availed themselves of ordinary sources of communication it seemed probable Pete might only receive their messages on his return journey.

At this juncture Major Fisher came out with a suggestion which, while it rather startled the old fisherman by its magnitude, was received with a good deal of favor by the worried lawyer. He knew, as the others could not realize, of the degree in which Pete's pecuniary interests were suffering by lack of executive ownership.

"Why don't you go up yourself, Mr. Graignic, and bring your son back?"

"I quite agree with the Major!" said the Judge. "Do it, Mr. Graignic. I will supply the funds for necessary expense out of monies in my hands belonging to the estate."

"It's more of an undertaking zan you understand," replied Mr. Graignic, after a moment's thought. "A steamer would be necessary, and it would mean considerable expense."

"Charter your steamer, or buy it," said Judge Sharpstein with decision. "I will open a credit for you at the bank of Cortesana for ten thousand dollars on which you can draw as you need the money."

This bewildering revelation of the altered financial plane on which his son's legacy placed him made the old man suddenly realize that small sums of money, and economical administration of them did not cut much of figure in the present case.

"But," he said, "even zen I may not find him. It's like looking for a needle in a bale of hay."

"If you do, and bring him back, it will save him double the money—"

"I'll go!" resolved the Frenchman. "I see ze matter is more important zan I comprehended."

"Good for you, Graignic!" congratulated the Major.

Judge Sharpstein looked at his watch:

"Let's go around to the bank now, and arrange the money matters. I want you to have a free hand."

They found the cashier of the Bank of Cortesana at his desk. In ten minutes they left the building, and the fisherman had a check book in his pocket, and ten thousand dollars at his disposal. They returned to the office, and Mr. Graignic inquired if

the lawyer desired to convey any legal papers through him to Pete.

"Since we have struck out this plan," said the Judge. "I have thought it out clearly, and it seems even more the part of wisdom than at first. If circumstances make it impossible for him to return with you, I will give you a power of attorney which he must execute. I have no further instructions for you. Act in every way as seems wisest in your judgment. If circumstances should arise in which you need more money, draw on me without hesitation, and I will see the matter through."

"I will write to Pete, and Miss Hogan will also want to send some messages by you," added the Major. "They will probably have more influence in hurrying the young rascal back than the news of this legacy."

"I will take ze night boat to Seattle," said Mr. Graignic, arising. "I intend to be on my way wizout loss of time."

"Good enough!" returned Judge Sharpstein, shaking hands with the Frenchman warmly. "You are the man I wanted. I rely on you absolutely."

"I return to Port Townsend to-night," said the Major. "Wire me from Seattle, and let me know if you've succeeded in getting a boat. I suppose you will stop at Port Townsend on your way out of the Sound?"

"Port Townsend, and Waldron Island," returned the fisherman, as he left the room.

The first person Major Fisher met on his return to Port Townsend was his son. Tom had arrived from California during his absence, and intended to remain with his father and mother until fall. The boy who had been Captain Pete's earliest friend and closest intimate had grown into a young man of much promise. He was inclined to enjoy the brighter side of life rather than to linger along its lower levels, but he had developed greatly on the earnest side of his character. He was much interested on hearing that the death of Mr. Hagan had made Pete a rich man, and deeply sympathetic over the untoward fortunes of the Hogan family.

The Fishers called on the Hogans that evening, and told them the result of the Major's interview with Judge Sharpstein, and the old fisherman at Cortesana. Grace was delighted and exclaimed:

"How splendid! I wish I could go myself with that dear old man."

Tom looked up suddenly, and catching her eye they exchanged a meaning glance. Shortly afterward they found themselves by the window, and Grace said:

"What did you mean, Tom?"

"*I am* going with Mr. Graignic to Alaska," he answered. "I haven't mentioned it to father or mother yet, but I made up my mind as soon as I heard of the plan."

"That's right! I'm so glad!" replied Grace.

"How I wish I could accompany you. I don't suppose it would be possible," she added, wistfully.

"I don't know," considered Tom doubtfully. "I don't hardly see how it could be managed."

CHAPTER XX

A SECOND EXPEDITION STARTS FOR THE YUKON WITH PETE'S FATHER IN COMMAND

TOM FISHER went to bed in a thoughtful mood. Even when the light was out and his head on the pillow he could not sleep. He had not spoken to his father of his intention to go with Mr. Graignic in search of Captain Pete, but it was not because of any faltering in his resolution. On the contrary, his purposes had become enlarged since his conversation with Grace. She and Tom had always been friends, and the fact that she was engaged to be married to Captain Pete, had served as a link to bind them together. When he closed his eyes he beheld her face with its imploring pout as she asked him if it were possible for her to go along. Then it flashed on him that he had never seen her bright countenance look so worn and languid:

"That girl is about done up with all this trouble. She's half ill now!" he soliloquised. "After all, why could not we arrange to take her? It would do her a world of good, and what a glorious surprise it would be to old Pete if we brought her to him in the wilds. She'd be on the boat all the time, and have no hardship to endure, and father says

he understands that the trip is safe at this time of the year. Old Mr. Graignic would look after her like a daughter—and I'm as good as a brother! By George, I'm going to try to fix it up!"

He turned over on his side, and wooed the drowsy god with more success.

When Major Fisher came to breakfast table the next morning Tom handed him a yellow envelope left by a messenger boy, and with his mother awaited expectantly for him to open it. The Major glanced at their faces with a smile, laid the telegram by the side of his plate, and with aggravating deliberation helped himself to a slice of ham. His wife looked vexed, then amused, and finally burst out:

"How can you be such a tease! Open that telegram immediately!"

"It must be from Mr. Graignic, Dad, and we want to hear the news," added his son.

"Oh," said the Major sedately, laying down his fork, and lifting the message. "I see! Now, it didn't occur to me that you two were curious."

They both laughed at the absurdity of this remark, and he opened the telegram, which in reality he was keenly interested in. He glanced over it, and then smoothing out the page, read aloud:

"Major Thomas Fisher.

"Have found, and will buy suitable steamer to-day. Want crew of three reliable men. One engineer. Do you know any one suitable? Answer by 4 P. M., Hotel Northern, Seattle."

"GRAIGNIC."

The Major was about to comment on the message when he happened to glance at his son. He understood the expression on that young man's face as plainly as if he had spoken, and his own features became grave. Instead of speaking he waited for Tom:

"I know of one 'reliable' man that will ship for the voyage;" said the youth. "And perhaps," he added thoughtfully, "I could get him two more!"

"You mean to go yourself?" queried his father.

"Yes, father, I made up my mind last night. And say, Dad, why cannot we take Grace Hogan along? She's ill, and worn to a shadow of her former self with grief for her father. Pete would rather see *her* than a letter from her!"

His mother had looked alarmed when he first announced his intentions, but now she fell back in her chair with a gasp of horrified amazement:

"Gracie!" she murmured. "Up to Alaska? Up the Yukon River!"

"Yes! Why not?" insisted Tom with earnestness. "The trip would make her well, and distract her mind from her loss. And, as I understand it, there are no especial dangers on the journey."

The Major had looked from one to the other without a chance to speak. Now he broke in:

"You seem to have this plan cut and dried, young man!"

"I thought it all out last night after I went to bed," acknowledged Tom.

"Well," continued the Major, "I suppose there is no reason why you should not go if you want to, although I had not contemplated it. But Grace Hogan is another affair! Would it be quite proper?"

He looked at Mrs. Fisher, whom he knew to be a safe guide in such matters, but Tom cut in before she had a chance to speak:

"Why, Dad, the old fisherman would be a father to the poor girl and I'll volunteer to do the fraternal act myself. And think what it will mean to old Pete!"

This last argument was a strong one with both the Major and Mrs. Fisher, for they both loved Pete dearly as they did their own son.

"What about it, mother?" asked the Major, evidently disposed to give his consent to the plan if his wife endorsed it.

It rather overwhelmed Mrs. Fisher to have the burden of the responsibility thrown upon her, and she was inclined to rebel:

"I have not gotten used to the idea of Tom going yet!" she complained. "And now you two want to make me decide whether Grace shall go. It's hardly fair." She pondered a moment with her head on her hand. "I—do—not—really—see—any—*impropriety*—in the matter. She is engaged to marry Pete, and Mr. Gaignic is his father. Of course, it is *unusual*, but under the circumstances—and the dear girl certainly *does* need the trip!"

"In short," laughed the Major, "you think there is no reason why she should not go if she wishes?"

"Why, no!" confessed the lady somewhat defiantly. "Of course, if this were the effete east—"

Her husband and son both chuckled with huge amusement:

"Lydia," remarked the Major, "you have broadened wonderfully since you came to this coast."

"Mother is all to the good!" announced Tom emphatically.

"Who did you have in mind for the other members of Mr. Graignic's crew?" asked the elder man.

"Do you remember Joe Hanlon? The big long-shoreman that the captain of the Bonito attempted to shanghai when Cloon was trying to make his get-away?"

"Of course," recalled the Major. "He *had* been in the navy, and he was a friend of Pete's, too, wasn't he?"

"That's the chap," returned Tom. "I happened to meet him yesterday, and he told me he was out of a job."

"Just the man!" commented the father with satisfaction.

"He had two chums at that time," continued Tom tentatively.

"Well, see him this morning," concluded the Major. "We'll take up the affair of Miss Grace later."

Tom knew that matter was just as good as set-

tled, and he ached to get a chance to tell her the good news. After the morning meal he descended the hill to the lower town to hunt up Joe Hanlon. He did not know exactly where to look, and remembered that Murph—the Port Townsend newsboy Captain Pete had sent to McNiel's Island to notify the warden of the projected escape of Bill Kelly—was a friend of Hanlon's, and would probably be able to put his hand upon him.

Murph was now a stalwart lad of seventeen. He had long since graduated from the business of selling papers, and was a trusted employee of Bernstein & Company, the wholesale grocers on Water Street. Tom found him in the shipping office, sleeves rolled up, packing a bill of goods.

"Hello, Mister Fisher," he exclaimed with a bright glance at Tom. "It's a good sight for sore eyes you are! And how is that gr-rand lad, Captain Pete? I'll be wid you in a minute."

He had the marking pot in his hand, and as he spoke he rapidly printed the shipping directions on a crate of raisins in a bold hand that made it evident he had made up some of the deficiencies of his early education. With a last artistic flourish he returned the brush to the ink pot, and turned to Tom as he rolled down his sleeves.

"And what can I be after doing for you, Mister Tom?" he asked.

"I want to find Joe Hanlon, Murph. Can you tell me where he is?"

"Sure! He's up at our house this minute. He's the lone man now, sir. Con Miller and Harry Prentice, his mates, have gone to Seattle, and he has come to board with the mother and me. It's the good man he is, sir!"

He put on his coat, left word in the office he was stepping out for a moment, and returned to Tom:

"We'll go right up, sir. And so ye want to see old Joe?" he said with some curiosity in his voice.

Tom could see no reason for secrecy, and related the whole story to Murph being aware how much the boy was interested in the fortunes of Pete. The young Irishman hung on his words. That Pete was now a capitalist delighted more than it surprised him. When the tale arrived at the point where it was determined that Mr. Graignic should go to Alaska in search of his son, and at the last to the telegram announcing that he was in need of a crew to man the steamer he had purchased, Murph became thoughtful, and looked at Tom with an expression that the latter did not quite understand at the time, although it became comprehensible later.

Murph called the longshoreman when they arrived at the house, and left him conferring with Tom Fisher. He himself seemed to have important private business with his mother which needed instant attention. He drew her out to the kitchen, and talked with her excitedly for five minutes. At the end of that time she apparently acquiesced in

some plan he urged, and he returned in great glee to the presence of Tom and Hanlon who had just come to an agreement.

"Murph," said Hanlon, "you'll have to look out for a new boarder! I've just signed on to go to Alaska this summer with Captain Pete's father."

The lad laughed in high spirits as he answered:

"It's the mother who'll have to be after looking out for *two* new boorders. I'm goin' to 'sign on' for that same v'y'ge meself if Mister Tom will take me. Ye needed two men besides yerself, didn't ye, sir?"

Tom was mightily pleased at securing two such desirable recruits. Murph, like most boys of his class brought up in a sea port town, was thoroughly familiar with craft of the kind in which the trip to Alaska would be made, and he had discovered in his talk with Hanlon that the longshoreman was not only a seaman, but a qualified engineer, a fact he knew would prove gratifying to Mr. Graignic. Murph volunteered to arrange with Bernstein & Company for leave of absence, and he and Hanlon were ready to report for duty at any moment. Tom started off to notify the Major of the unexpected success of his mission.

The Major promptly wired Mr. Graignic that he had a crew of three reliable men—one a competent engineer—ready to his hand. An hour after he had sent the telegram he received one in answer couched in the following words:

"Send your men on by night boat. Report Hotel Northern. Have purchased steamer, and am getting ready for sea. Hope to make Port Townsend, outward bound, inside of seventy-two hours.

"GRAIGNIC."

This telegram put them all in a flutter:

"Well," observed Tom's father. "The old fisherman is certainly a man of action!"

"But," complained Mrs. Fisher, "I am to lose my boy almost the moment he has arrived at home. And poor Gracie!" she suddenly remembered. "How on earth will she ever be able to get her clothes ready for such a long trip?"

They both laughed at this. The problem did not seem such a serious one to the masculine mind. Then the Major said:

"But we must get busy, Tom. Your mother is right. There is no time to waste. You find Murph, and tell him to have Joe Hanlon with him ready to meet you at the boat. I will go around to the Hogan's at once, and tell Gracie that she can go on the trip if Pete's father sees no objection to the plan. You had better come along, Lydia, and help her pack!"

When Grace was told the result of Tom's interference in her behalf she gave a gurgle of joy, and rushed off to prepare her mother's mind for the proposition. Mrs. Hogan took the announcement with more equanimity than they had expected. After thinking it over a moment she consented, and promptly began with Mrs. Fisher to go over her daughter's wardrobe, and arrange that she should

be properly equipped for the journey. To a "mere man" this would have seemed a sufficiently simple matter for a trip where only Indians and the rudest pioneers would be met, but it took these ladies every moment of the time left them to outfit the young woman to their approval.

The next morning Tom Fisher with his two recruits lined up in the office of the Hotel Northern in Seattle. Before they had time to ask for him, the fisherman came down from the breakfast room. Tom had enjoined his father against wiring the identity of the three men he had engaged for Mr. Graignic, and he thought when his gaze first rested on Tom that the meeting was accidental, but the next instant his rapid eye took in Murph and Hanlon, both of whom he knew, and he understood that this was the "crew" the Major had sent him. The hardy old fisherman had come to the conclusion that in his present character of captain of a steamer it was good form to pay more attention to his personal appearance than was his habit on Waldron Island, and he was attired in a well-fitting suit of Scotch tweed, which he wore with a French nattiness that was as surprising as it was unexpected to those who had known him in his ordinary garb. His hair and beard were also trimmed, and altogether, as Tom thought, he looked like a man that was worth while.

"Does zis mean zat *you* are goin' along wiz me as deck hand, Mr. Fisher?" he asked with a smile,

as he shook hands with them. As Tom nodded, he continued: "Of course Hanlon and Murph are all right, and ze best fellows I could get."

"What's the matter with me, Mr. Graignic?" asked Tom ruefully. "Don't you want me?"

"Why, yes, I suppose I will take you," he said with a smile. "But you will have to work pretty hard."

Tom laughed at this. At the beginning he had really been a little uneasy, fearing the fisherman might consider him rather ornamental than useful. He protested:

"I think you will find I can keep up my end, sir."

"Well, I don't doubt it," the Frenchman replied. "Every man has to pull his pound in a trip of zis kind, you know, unless he goes as a supernumerary. Now suppose we all go down to ze bunkers. Ze *Tyee* lies zere coaling. I shall try to get my stores aboard so we can make a start by noon."

When he heard the name of the vessel, Tom recollected the sloop *Tyee* in which he had taken his first sail on Puget Sound waters with this man's son, then a ragged ignorant urchin peddling fish through the Islands of the San Juan archipelago. It was that very trip that started the train of events that led up to his coming to Port Townsend, gaining an education, and resulted in the career that had made the little fisher boy one of the substantial men in this new state of Washington. A sudden rush of feeling brought the blood to his face, and

made his eyes wet as he extended his hand to his chum's father. He exclaimed:

"Hurrah for the new *Tyee*, Mr. Graignic. She may be bigger and smarter, but I can't ever love her so much as I did the old sloop that Pete used to be captain of before he passed us all in the race for fortune."

The fisherman looked at Tom with a very kindly expression in his keen gray eyes as he answered:

"If it had not been for you and your fazer ze lad might never have gotten ze start zat has resulted in placing him where he is. We can never forget zat."

"Oh, come," said Tom, rather ashamed of his emotion. "If he hadn't had it in him it would never have come out."

"Perhaps zat is true, too," assented the proud father as they started for the coal bunkers.

CHAPTER XXI

THE TYEE'S LADY PASSENGER. TWIN-PEAK MOUNTAIN AND DESSERT-SPOON BAR

AS the sun came up on the morning of the first of July the *Tyee* steamed into Port Townsend, and made fast to the wharf. Major Fisher was on the lookout for her. Captain Graignic the elder stood on the bow, and deck hand Tom Fisher threw the warp attached to the hawser by which they were to be tied fast to the post on the wharf. Tom was so determined to fulfill his captain's requirements that he did not recognize his parent's presence by more than a hasty gesture until the steamer was safely moored. Then the fisherman waved his hand to him, and he leaped ashore.

Captain Graignic joined them in a moment, and they saw engineer Joe Hanlon protrude his grimy face from the scuttle leading to the engine room. Murph paraded the deck with somewhat ostentatious indifference to the inquiring looks of acquaintances, putting things in ship-shape order.

"Isn't she a beaut?" demanded Tom as they faced the steamer.

Indeed she was, and the Major acknowledged the

fact cordially. The fisherman, in the exercise of his large discretionary powers from Judge Sharpstein, had purchased a brand-new stern-wheeled river steamer just off the ways. It was up to date in every respect and as good a craft of the class as there was afloat. Captain Graignic explained to Major Fisher—Tom now learned the fact for the first time—that he had bought the *Tyee* at an exceedingly reasonable price by paying spot cash. He felt sure he could sell the vessel for more money than she had cost when he was through with her, and felt, in this view of the matter, that he was justified in purchasing outright rather than chartering.

Major Fisher approved the fisherman's business sagacity, and wrote to Judge Sharpstein congratulating him on selecting Mr. Graignic as leader of the search party.

Then Captain Graignic heard that the *Tyee* was going to have a lady passenger, if he gave his approval to the plan. He was strongly in favor of it, and when told that Gracie's health in some measure depended on the voyage he became enthusiastic. He led the Major aboard, showed him the comfortable after-cabin, and declared it should be given to "Pete's girl." The Major suggested some minor alterations, and assured the anxious fisherman she would be satisfied with her accommodations. Before the Major left Captain Graignic announced that he would leave Port Townsend that evening, and

lie over all night at Waldron Island in order to bid adieu to his family, and arrange for his absence.

The adventurers on board the *Gracie* breathed more freely as the tossing dory became a speck in the distance.

"Now," said Pete, "we're off for the mine! I don't believe that outfit will trouble us any more."

Ib-won assured them there were no obstacles to navigation for a long distance except the fierce current. They found the driftwood made excellent fuel, and produced plenty of steam. As they churned merrily along all congregated on deck, and gazed at the shore with interest. They soon began to realize that the Yukon River did not flow through the barren waste they had imagined. Before noon they passed a little tumble-down settlement that had formerly been a trading station belonging to the Russians. The Greek chapel still survived, and the priest, Ib-won said, had a numerous flock of followers among the Indians, his father being a Russian who had married one of the Esquimau women. The church looked strangely out of place amid its barbaric surroundings. Many of the interior fittings were of solid silver, and polished brass, and where these more or less expensive decorations were lacking they were replaced by home-made devices of a cheaper kind, which were carefully designed to be attractive to the eye of the Indian convert.

After leaving this place behind, they came to a considerable Indian village, and as there was a little harbor in front formed by the projecting bank, they stopped for an hour to view it more closely. It contained twenty or thirty families, who lived in birch-bark houses. Our friends thought that while these might be comfortable enough during the summer season, it would be difficult to keep warm in them during the Arctic winter, when the thermometer ranged between thirty-five and sixty degrees below zero. They made acquaintance here with the large skin boats or *Oomiens* these people use for river traffic. When they want to go up stream with a loaded *Oomien* they hitch dogs to it like mules on a tow-path, and a team of the powerful and intelligent animals will drag a boat laden down with two or three tons of freight at the rate of fifteen or twenty miles a day.

Joe Floyd noticed a pile of cordwood ranked upon the river bank, and inquired the reason of it as it was obvious the natives were not sufficiently fore-handed to provide fuel for winter. It turned out to be a private enterprise of the head man of the village, and was on sale to any passing steamer. Ib-won said they would find cordwood at intervals to the further end of the river. This relieved them of anxiety on the score of fuel.

Captain Pete ran the *Gracie* night as well as day, and they advanced rapidly. It was well he took advantage of favoring conditions for the next

morning that headwind set in again. The Esquimau told them it was apt to prevail almost continuously at that season on this part of the river, but further in the interior they would leave it behind. The gale blew six hours, and Pete started his engine the moment it was practicable to make headway. They forged ahead fifteen or twenty miles before it began again, and they were once more obliged to make fast to the bank. For the next two days this was a sample of their experiences, and then they seemed to have left the wind-belt behind them.

As they ascended, the river grew more interesting. The occasional islands which had dotted the waters at the beginning became more numerous until they seemed to be passing through an archipelago, which barely let the water pass between. The sun was bright, the stream less turbid, and they were enchanted with the picturesqueness and beauty of their surroundings. The Yukon was ten or twelve miles wide, and both sides clothed with evergreen forest. Even the islands were wooded to their edges, and fringed with sand. As they drew past one after another it was a succession of new and entrancing views.

“By the Scales of the Armadillo!” exclaimed the ex-revenue man in high spirits. “If one of those artist fellows I used to see around Victoria in knickerbockers was here, he’d go crazy with delight at the chance to make pictures.”

"It sure is a fine country," confirmed the rancher.

Their young leader heartily agreed with them, and Ib-won, who had taken on the attitude of a host, glowed with pride as he noted their appreciation. The endless panorama continued to unfold before their eyes like a moving picture. Every day they passed one or more Indian villages, and it was no uncommon thing to meet the natives in their boats going from one place to another.

When they were obliged to stop for wood, they found the plague of mosquitoes, of which they had an intimation before, as bad as ever. Not only were the "singing birds," as Ib-won called them, present in myriads, but swarms of tiny black gnats, whose bite was even fiercer than that of the larger insect, made it impossible for them to remain in the open air without the protection of gloves, and the netting headgear.

Wild game existed in astonishing quantities. It was a common thing to see deer crossing the river by swimming from island to island, and they had no difficulty in keeping their table well supplied with venison through this source. Joe Floyd was huntsman in chief, and they came to believe that any wild animal they saw was as good as in the pot if he marked it down as his own. Once they discovered a huge black bear eating berries on the bank some hundreds of yards ahead. The beast seemed as large as a buffalo, and Pete exclaimed:

"By Jove, I wish I had that fellow's hide!"

"'Tain't far enough in the summer to be mangy yet," drawled the rancher. "I'll get it for you."

They dropped him ashore, and threw out their kedge. Half an hour later they heard the thin report of the woodsman's rifle, and he came out on a sand-bar a quarter of a mile ahead and waved his hat. By the time the *Gracie* had reached the point the old hunter had ripped the skin from the animal, and cut off the best part of the loin for a roast. It took three of them to carry the pelt down from the ravine to the side of the *Gracie*, and they had to hoist it aboard by a tackle.

Once they killed a swimming moose, and this time Ib-won played the chief part in the drama. They were going through a broad, clear part of the river when the Esquimau became excited, and pointed out a black speck in the water near the middle of the stream, which his keen eye had discerned to be crowned with moose antlers. He begged Pete to be allowed to kill it in his own way. The young man consented, and they manned the small boat with Ib-won in the prow armed with the saw-toothed spear which was his only weapon. As the rowers pulled the boat on the moose, he jabbed the point of his spear into its side until he succeeded in turning the badgered animal's head toward the *Gracie*; although it had been swimming straight away when overtaken. When the poor beast tried to veer from the straight course, Ib-won spurred

him until he forced him back. After driving his victim to within a few yards of the steamer, he transfixed him with a skillful thrust clear through his body from side to side. As the moose gave up the ghost, Ib-won seized his antler, and supported the carcass until they got alongside and made a rope fast to it.

Captain Pete had brought his fly rod, and plenty of hooks, and lines. He was an expert fisherman, and though they all turned anglers when the opportunity served, was the most successful. The catch was principally grayling from a quarter up to a pound in weight. It was a beautiful and delicately-flavored fish, and made a welcome addition to their bill of fare.

With these diversions everybody was happy, and the days sped along rapidly. At the end of two weeks Pete came on deck one morning after breakfast, and said to Kennedy and Floyd:

"As nearly as I can figure we must be getting in the neighborhood of the Frenchman's creek."

"You don't mean to say," asked Kennedy, "that we've come sixteen hundred miles already?"

"Nigh on to it!" asserted Floyd.

"Yes," resumed Pete. "I think I am about right. I went over my log this morning, and I have a fairly accurate idea of the distance we've made. We ought to be within fifty miles of Dessert Spoon Bar."

"By the Reindeer's Tail!" exclaimed Kennedy. "We'll have to keep our eyes peeled for that twin-peaked snow mountain."

"If I understand the story right," remarked Floyd, "you don't see the mountain until you are abreast of the Spoon sand-bar."

"No," confirmed Pete. "That's how I interpreted it. Some natural trend or conformation of the country makes it invisible along the river except from that one point. I think that from this time we had better travel only in full daylight, and keep a sharp look out."

The others agreed, and Floyd called Ib-won. The old hunter possessed a talent for communicating with animals and outlandish people. This facility had caused him to become the medium of communication between the Esquimau and the others when any especial information was required. Captain Pete and Kennedy watched in silence as he began to describe the Twin-Peaks and the Desert Spoon Bar to the native. Ib-won saw they were deeply interested, and gave close attention to Floyd. The latter began by describing the two peaks on the mountain. He had picked up a few words of Esquimau, and finally drew an imaginary mountain split in half at the top. By using the word *mel-rok*, meaning two, and *oppa*—snow—he made him understand he meant a snow-covered mountain with two peaks. When he was certain he had this image planted on his mind, he patiently tried to

picture that peculiarly-shaped sand-bar. Joe happened to know that *ar-thru-tuk* was spoon in Ib-won's tongue, but he was at a loss to convey the idea to him that what he meant was a river-bar shaped like the *ar-thru-tuk*. As they wallowed on in the explanation Floyd happened to raise his eyes. The *Gracie* was at the moment passing a long, slender sand-spit. Like a flash he pointed it out to the Esquimau, and then to his chalk diagram on the deck, and repeated the native word. In sudden enlightenment Ib-won caught a glimpse of what the white man was driving at, and his dark face became alive with intelligence as with a sweeping gesture he included the two rude sketches—one of Dessert Spoon Bar, and the other of Twin-Peak mountain in one. He had fully fathomed Floyd's meaning, and it was evident before he spoke that he knew of Blondin's creek. He pointed up the river with a dazzling smile of joy at being able to tell them what they apparently so greatly desired to know:

“Ah-ah! Ah-ah!” he shouted. “Yes, yes! one—two—fifty miles!”

It was evident he had recognized the locality, and was attempting to tell them they were not far from it. “Fifty miles” apparently meant to him a distance not much further than his “one-two.” But the rancher was still unsatisfied. The rest of his task however, proved less formidable, and he drew out of Ib-won that before they had eaten (an event

from which he dated all occurrences) twice they would arrive at what he called *Ill-rit*, by which name the rancher maintained he meant Twin-Peak mountain.

“Well, we’ll know whether he is right or not by supper time,” said Captain Pete, “for that is the second meal from now.”

As they realized they had almost reached their goal, the thought sobered them. Since they had taken up their adventure they had been so incessantly occupied in its prosecution they had hardly had time to let their imaginations dwell on the glittering prospect of the riches that lay hidden in that lonely creek ready for them to take out of the ground. Floyd had followed many a gold rush in California, and was able to be philosophic. He had known the feeling before, and could take the disappointment with equanimity.

With Captain Kennedy it was different. The scheme, in a sense, was his own. Blondin had bequeathed him the wonderful secret, and (to tell the truth) he had hugged it to his breast and gloated over it until it had become a portion of his being even before they had left Victoria on the actual quest. He was a poor man, and the possibility of the sudden acquisition of more than competence—even wealth—in this rapid and pleasant way had so fired his heart that he had come to dwell on it as a certainty. If his hopes should be blasted it would

be the most serious blow he had ever received, and he refused to contemplate the possibility.

Captain Pete was less concerned. The boy was level headed, and from the start he had restrained himself from counting the prospect of digging a fortune out of the ground in this easy way as more than a possibility, or as he had called it in his mind "a bit of a speculation." He had needed the diversion, and took up the adventure because it seemed unalloyed pleasure with a chance of profit. If Blondin's creek had been rifled of its golden treasure before they arrived, or the Frenchman's tale proved a romance unfounded on fact, he would not attach a great amount of importance to the disaster. Besides unlike his friend Kennedy, he already possessed a fortune sufficient to the modest needs of his life.

CHAPTER XXII

THE SCOTCH TRADER AND WHAT HE TOLD FLOYD

IT was about 10 o'clock in the morning when Ib-won told them they would arrive at Ill-rit at the second meal. As the day wore on the members of the Yellowbird Gold Mining Company became more or less pre-occupied. Dinner was perfunctorily dispatched and they returned hastily to the deck of the *Gracie* to hang over the port rail and scrutinize every opening reach of the great river. They did not talk much, and when they did their conversation was brief and abstracted.

The Yukon had narrowed considerably as they came towards its headwaters and the current was swifter. In addition to this the river bed was full of sand, mud, and gravel bars. These were peculiarly aggravating just at this time when the heart of every one was set on getting ahead as rapidly as possible. There was always a particularly swift current in the passages by the spits and gravel bars, and once they shaved one so closely that the *Gracie's* nose caught slightly in the shingle, and she hung for a moment as if undecided whether to stop or go on. Kennedy swore softly but fervently to him-

self, while even Floyd and Pete looked more serious than usual, until her head swung off under the thrust of the engine and the vessel resumed her course. It was a glorious day and the ardent sun shone down out of the cloudless blue sky. The thermometer registered a little less than a hundred degrees inside of the wheel house out of the sun. In fact, it seemed even warmer than that to our adventurers, for the reflections from the orb of day gleaming upon the waters of the river redoubled the heat.

The *Gracie* was now beginning to emerge from the mountainous district though they could still see a chain of great snow-covered peaks on the left. The soil was also changing character and seemed to be thick and black wherever it was exposed to observation by the caving in of the river bank. The grass grew luxuriantly and many prairies freckled the timber along shore, though even in these there was an undergrowth of tangled stunted brush, which would have made walking unpleasant if not impossible. In some of the little open plains the ground was covered, as Pete could discern through his field glasses, with a sponge-like moss or peat. Where the bank was gravelly—so as to give good drainage—and the river excavated it gradually, this thick moss was so interwoven that it would not break when the river banks were undermined but remained compactly attached to the crest, forming huge grass, root-woven blankets a

foot thick that festooned and overhung the gravel fifteen or twenty feet below. This moss would reach clear to the water and was heavy enough to uphold the weight of a bear or moose. At places great ragged patches were torn out of the hem of this green blanket by the limbs or roots of drifting logs, and the edges of the moss would be pulled down so that it formed a fringe along the shore to the surface of the water.

As the afternoon wore on the sky became banked with clouds and the heat was less oppressive. The river was about seven miles wide, and unusually clear from sand bars and islands. Pete held his course well towards the port bank, and half a mile from the shore. Ib-won now became attentive to his surroundings. He took his station on the bow of the boat and scanned the shores keenly on either side. At that point, according to the *Gracie's* compass, the Yukon's channel bore east and west. To the northward, perhaps fifty miles away but plainly perceptible in the clear atmosphere, was the broken mountain chain. A mile or two ahead the river turned about the base of a great clay bluff and sheered to the eastward.

As they approached this promontory Ib-won could scarcely contain himself. He was evidently full of some anticipation, but was half afraid that his expectations might be disappointed. His restless gaze roved from bank to bank as if he were trying to identify each rock in sight. When the

Gracie drew close to the bluff, and hugged it rounding the point, he could scarcely restrain his excitement. Pete and Floyd had observed the Esquimau's excitement, and were watching him closely. Kennedy was too much absorbed to notice what was going on.

The little vessel swept around the headland and came into a clear reach of water a mile long. She swung in into the open stretch with increased speed, and nearer to the port bank than before. The shore was shelving and a short distance ahead the spruce and birch forest dwindled into a small prairie. As they churned their way against the current, and opened up the shore foot by foot Ib-won leaned over the rail, and concentrated his gaze on the point where the forest terminated and the plain began. In a moment more they swept past the last tree, and it was seen that the shore was scooped out behind the point into a little oval bay into the middle of which a peculiarly-shaped sand-spit projected from the mouth of the creek into the river from a narrow gulch.

Ib-won slowly straightened up, his eyes still clinging to the shore. Pete and Floyd, and Kennedy who had also caught the infection of the moment, crowded to the bow as they came opposite the point of sand. Pete silently nodded at the others, his heart too close to his mouth to permit him to speak.

It was the exact shape of a spoon, with the bowl

towards the deep water, and the long slender handle leading to the shore!

The next moment the Esquimau let out a falsetto, eldritch screech of excitement—that roused Dope from peaceful slumber and brought him scurrying to the others—and pointed into the distance.

“Ill-rit!” he cried triumphantly.

It was a fact. As they came exactly in front of Dessert Spoon Bar they looked north along the edge of the towering forest, and far in the distance gleamed the twin peaks of the great mountain sentinel of Blondin’s placer mine.

Captain Pete was nearest to the whistle. He reached out his hand and pulled the cord. A long, shrill screech of triumph pierced the air and while it was still sounding Kennedy jerked off his hat and threw it high as he hurrahed at the top of his lungs. Pete and Kennedy were starting to follow his example when they instantaneously became silent, and remained as if frozen suddenly to the deck.

From the upper reaches of the river came to their ears—faintly, but clearly perceptible—the sound of an answering steam whistle. This new and unexpected development brought the three members of the Yellow Bird Gold Mining Company to their bearings in a jiffy.

“By the Tail of my Grandmother’s Black Cat!” ejaculated Kennedy, thoroughly surprised by the unexpected answering whistle.

"By the Great Horn Spoon!" the rancher exclaimed.

Pete looked from one to the other before he spoke: "Yes," he said as if in answer. "It is rather annoying! It would not do to go ashore just now and look after gold, if there are any other white men around."

"Not much," agreed Kennedy promptly. "And by the Hyena's Stripes! Those other fellows don't want to go ashore here either, or else there is going to be trouble."

"Keep cool," advised the rancher, "'tain't likely as fur's I kin see."

"Of course there's another boat up there," Pete remarked. "Who can it be? There's one thing certain! It isn't Lee Sing and the *Dragon's Fang* outfit, for they're behind us."

"I s'pose likely," the rancher said, "that it's a trader, maybe from one of the big fur companies. I've heerd they come up the river once in a while in little steamers to barter for peltries with the injuns."

"Yes, that's likely," agreed the ex-revenue man, somewhat ashamed of his premature excitement.

"Well then," said Pete, "all we've got to do is to keep straight ahead until we meet up with the fellow. I guess it will be better if we come across him further up the river. So far as I can see it will be more sensible not to draw attention to Dessert Spoon Bar by stopping in the neighbor-

hood. We can hang around our trading friend pretending we are in the same business until he goes on down the river, or at any rate gets out of the vicinity. Then we will come back to the Bar and see what Blondin's Placer mine amounts to."

The others both agreed that Pete's plan was the proper one, and they quietly continued their journey leaving Ill-rit and the Dessert Spoon Bar behind them. They cast many longing glances back as they continued their journey, and Ib-won in particular ruminated with some contempt on the curious mental vagaries of his white friends. Why they should so eagerly hunt for Ill-rit and then ignore it entirely when they had reached the spot was something entirely beyond his comprehension; and after revolving the matter over in his simple mind he came to the conclusion that all his civilized friends were slightly idiotic, albeit good-natured and pleasant to associate with. He let it go at this.

Half a mile further on the whistle sounded again, and Pete gave an answering blast. It was apparent the two vessels were rapidly approaching one another, and in fact twenty minutes later they saw a puff of steam through the shrubbery of an intervening point and could hear the exhaust of the other steamer. It shortly hove in sight and turned out to be a little flat-bottomed river craft of 8 or 9 tons burden with a crew of one man. There was a little cove close to where they met, and

both vessels ran in, and threw out a kedge. The stranger had a bark canoe, and he launched it and paddled over to the *Gracie* before they had time to pull up their dingy for the purpose of making him a visit. He was an alert, red-haired Scotch Canadian. He told Pete his name was Angus Sinclair, and that he had come up the river the year before looking for rare and valuable skins. He was attached to no Company and had been trading and trapping on his own account. Our adventurers were inclined to like the Scotchman, and if it had not been that his presence interfered with their plans in opening up the Blondin mine they would have been disposed to join forces with him. His little boat was named the *Ranger* and only had six horse power. Sinclair acknowledged he had a good deal of trouble ascending the river, and that at times the current almost swept him back, but he had been in no hurry and only drew only eighteen inches so he could almost skim over the bars where the current was feebler; and as he said he had all the time he needed, and wasn't carrying passengers on schedule. They took supper with him that evening and Sinclair showed them a package of thirty blue and black fox peltries, which he affirmed were worth from two to five hundred dollars apiece. He had procured them from the Indians on the upper river and the whole lot had not cost him ten dollars in trade. Floyd, who knew something of furs and their values, estimated the lot to be

salable for between eight and ten thousand dollars. The trapper also had a number of less valuable skins, and altogether it was evident he was highly satisfied with the outcome of his enterprise.

Sinclair took a great notion to Floyd. He and the rancher were much the same type of man, and while the Scotchman liked all of his new friends, he was peculiarly attracted to Floyd. Towards the end of the evening it happened that Kennedy and Pete had gone back to the *Gracie* on some momentary errand and left the two together. The Scotchman looked at Floyd hesitatingly a moment, and then said:

"Floyd, you seem to me like a rare good chap, and I am going to tell you a bit of something before the others come back. Look-a-here, mon!"

He took a buckskin pouch from the inside of his shirt and opened it in his hand. Although it was ten o'clock at night there was plenty of light left in the heavens for Floyd to see clearly what was spread before him in the other's palm. There were seven or eight irregular gold nuggets as large as a grape, and half a handful of smaller ones.

"I got these from two Indians for a pound of tobacco," whispered the Scotchman. "Do you know anything about mining, Floyd?"

"Not much," returned the giant rancher, successfully concealing the emotion aroused by the sight of the gold. "Do you know where it came from?"

"Oh, I got it from the Indians three or four hundred miles above here. They told me it came from a creek that had some Indian name like Klarndic. I don't know the least thing about mining and the bucks said it was some distance away so I did not go there, but it seems to me it would be a good chance for anyone who is willing to take time and hunt it up."

"It's mighty good of you to tell me this," said Floyd rather shame-facedly, with the knowledge of his own great secret of the fortune awaiting them at Dessert Spoon Bar in his mind.

"Oh!" said the Scotchman, "dinna fash yersel! The *Ranger's* cargo will give me all the money I'll ever need. I'm going to turn it into cash at Montreal and go back to Bonnie Scotland for the rest of my life. So you see, mon, I've nae use for the gear."

"You're a good fellow all the same!" answered the rancher as he shook his hand warmly.

CHAPTER XXIII

ANOTHER INTERRUPTION BY TWO TOUGH CUSTOMERS

AFTER a moment's reflection Floyd concluded he had better secure all the particulars Sinclair could give him in regard to this new gold discovery. They returned to the cabin, and the rancher made a memorandum on paper of the location of the creek as nearly as the trapper could describe it. The information was more general than in detail, and Sinclair did not even know to what tribe the two Indians from whom he had bought the gold belonged. However, he described the village where they lived, and declared it to be a permanent settlement. The names of the Indians were Lintoo and Tatshun. On the whole the old miner thought it possible he might be able to trace up the nuggets to their source, and with the idea of having a second string to the Yellowbird Gold Mining Company's bow, he made his notes very carefully.

Shortly Kennedy and Captain Pete came back from the *Gracie* and the conversation was turned to other topics by Floyd in deference to the Scotchman's evident intention that the rancher should

be the sole possessor of the secret. Sinclair proved to be an interesting fellow, and had experienced many adventures during his sojourn in this wild country that were interesting and instructive to our adventurers. In fact, the *rencontre*—despite their disappointment over the delay—proved a pleasant break in the monotony of their long trip. They had not seen a stranger—with the exception of the Esquimaux and hostile Chinamen—since their departure from Unalaska, and the sight of this new and friendly face was very welcome to them. Sinclair's supply of flour and bacon had long been exhausted, and his tea and coffee were gone as well. In fact about all he had left, except tobacco and articles for barter with the Indians, of the outfit with which he started from civilization was half a bushel of salt. As the *Gracie* was well supplied with stores Captain Pete fitted him out so that he would fare sumptuously until his arrival at St. Michaels, where he intended to make his first stop.

The grateful and generous Scotchman took down his bundle of fox skins again, and insisted on presenting Pete with a magnificent blue fox pelt. Pete was delighted for he could already see it around Grace's neck. He tried to force Sinclair to accept adequate payment, but the trapper insisted on making it a free gift.

One unpleasant piece of news they heard was that there were a number of white men in the country.

Sinclair had met at least a dozen, and he warned our friends that some of them were pretty tough customers whom it would be just as well to keep at a distance. They were mostly half-wild trappers in the employ of the large trading companies. They had imposed on and bullied the Indians until the generally peaceful natives had been aroused to revengefulness, and on one occasion he knew of, they had made reprisals by ambushing and killing two of the men.

The Scotchman left them the next morning. They remained at anchor until he was out of sight before they prepared to start back, and felt glad—though rather ashamed of the sentiment—when they saw the last of him. It turned out, however, to Kennedy's immense disgust, that Sinclair was not to be the only hindrance intervening between the Yellowbird Gold Mining Company and the prosecution of its work. Half an hour after he had disappeared, when they were about to take in their kedge and go back to Dessert Spoon Bar, they heard a gun shot in the distance. They stopped operations and waited with their glasses fixed on the point half a mile above them from whence the sound had seemed to come. Before long a large *oomien* containing a man at the bow and one at the stern made its appearance, and floated down the current towards them.

The *Gracie* still lay in the cove where she had met the *Ranger*, and Pete with Floyd and Kennedy,

had gone ashore and were watching the strangers approach from the point. They were shortly able to discern through their glasses that the new comers were white men, and as they came nearer their wild aspect and savage appearance was decidedly unprepossessing.

"Well," said Floyd. "I reckon we won't start any gold mining while them chaps are in the neighborhood."

"No," responded Pete, "I shouldn't wonder if these turned out to be a couple of the 'tough customers' that decent Scotchman told us of."

"By the Ring-tailed Roarer!" exclaimed Kennedy. "This makes me tired."

"Perhaps they'll go past without seeing the *Gracie*," observed Pete hopefully.

"Mebbe," returned Floyd doubtfully, "but we ain't very well hid."

"Anyway," said Kennedy, "let's go on board, I'd just as lief have a gun in reach when those fellows get close to."

They pushed off the dingy, and returned to the *Gracie*. Dope was already uneasy and faced the bow—which headed towards the river—sniffing the breeze which came down from the strangers inquiringly. His master quieted him, and they waited expectantly. In a moment the boat drifted into sight a couple of hundreds of yards distant. It looked for an instant as if they would get by without detecting the converted tug, but at the last

moment the steersman, who was facing the stern of the boat, raised his eyes and saw the *Gracie* and the little cluster of men on board of her regarding them. He gave a wild whoop and turned the bow of the *oomien* into the cove, while his mate, who had also caught on by this time, began to pull hard. In a moment they were alongside.

A nearer view did not dispose our adventurers to regard them more favorably. They were sun-burnt and bearded, and clothed in buckskin garments. This of course emphasized their barbaric appearance but in addition their features and demeanor were singularly wild and reckless. Each had a forty-four revolver in their belts, and two repeating rifles lay on a bale of skins in the middle of the boat.

"Klahowya tillicum!"¹ the man in the stern shouted to Floyd who was gazing down on him from above with a face from which cordiality was conspicuously absent. "You don't look none too much pleased to see us." He shifted his gaze to the features of Pete and Kennedy, and failed to find any more welcome there. "It seems to me like you might smile a little when you meet up with a fellow white man in this wilderness," he concluded in some bitterness.

"That's accordin' to what kind of 'fellow white man' it is," replied the big rancher, with curious, drawling crispness.

*A Chinook greeting.

"Oh, well," the second stranger began in an oily way that failed to commend him to our friends. "You needn't be hostile! We're all right, and honest trappers working for the Alaska Commercial Company. We've been up above trading with the injuns, and a lot of them got sore on us a hundred miles above here, so we thought we'd better get out down the river." He looked apprehensively behind him, and added: "I shouldn't wonder much if some of them had followed us down."

"What caused your trouble with them?" asked Captain Pete.

"Why," answered the steersman, "my mate here"—he indicated the other—"is something of a masher, and he made eyes at one of the good-looking Klootchmans in the village. The bucks got after him mighty sharp, and we came near having to cut loose with the winchesters."

Long Tom and Scotch Jimmy had joined the others at the side, and Dope poked his inquiring black nose over the rail. It was evident he did not approve of the Alaska Commercial representatives for he showed his white teeth in a menacing growl that caused Pete to seize him hastily by the collar. The *Gracie* adventurers looked at each other, and it was evident they were of one mind. Joe Floyd elected himself as spokesman:

"Now see here, my friends," he said ingratiatingly, "from what you tell me and from what I see

of you I shouldn't wonder if them injuns had a heap of horse sense. I reckon the best thing you kin do is to keep on down the river. You will find the Alaska Commercial Company still doing business at the old stand in Dutch Harbor. Now s'pose you mosey along."

The two men listened to Floyd's sardonic speech as if thunderstruck. Then the face of the one in the stern became convulsed with wrath, and with catlike quickness he sprung forward and reached for one of the rifles. His companion, however, was quicker and more dangerous; his forty-four was already out of his belt when Kennedy's voice pierced the air with startling abruptness:

"Hands up!"

It was lucky for the two "tough customers" they did not disregard the mandate. Pete and Kennedy had experience in this sort of warfare, and both of them were probably as "quick on the draw" as any man in the northwest. Each had his man covered before he had time to become dangerous, and there was nothing left for the trappers save instant acceptance of the situation; their hands shot in the air as if drawn up by some invisible force. Floyd had not altered his lounging position and gazed down at the foiled ruffians whimsically:

"Now will you be good?" he drawled. "I thought like enough you was bad eggs, but I didn't allow you was goin' to give yourselves away so

soon." His bantering tone suddenly changed to one of stern determination: "Jimmy," he said to the little Scotchman, "jump down into that boat. Keep your hands up!" he warned the men savagely. "Just pass up those two side arms, Jimmy, and take the cartridges out of the rifles."

Jimmy executed the rancher's orders silently, and in a workmanlike manner. "Got any more ammunition?" Joe inquired of the Oily One.

"Not a cartridge!" answered the man in the stern in a voice that showed his nerve had given out. "For the love of Moses don't set us adrift without a shot in the locker. We have not even got any meat, and we'd starve before we got to the mouth of the river."

"Tom," said Pete quietly, "get out a side of bacon and a sack of flour, and toss them into the boat."

As Long Tom executed this order Floyd nodded gravely: "Just the thing," he remarked. "Now Jimmy, hand up them rifles. They'd only be in the way, boys, if you haven't got no more cartridges," he assured the chapfallen couple consolingly.

They gazed at each other in consternation as Jimmy passed the Winchesters to Floyd. From their disappointment it was apparent they still had ammunition with which they could have replaced the shells taken from the magazines.

"Now," commanded the rancher, "dig out of

here, and don't you stop before nightfall. If we catch you around here again we'll sure shoot you up some. Git out!"

They had gotten up steam when Sinclair, the Scotchman, took his departure, and Captain Pete suggested that it might be wise if they should follow the trappers down the river at half speed, so as to be certain they did not remain in the vicinity. Both the rancher and the ex-revenue man highly approved of this idea, and they hauled the kedge aboard. When the *Gracie* came out into the broad stream the Alaska Commercial men were drifting past the rounded point of Dessert Spoon Bar. They had ceased paddling, and were holding a consultation. Kennedy—whose mind was full of the Blondin placer mine—feared on the instant they were planning to dis-embark at the very spot where he himself was so anxious to arrive. In nervous haste he seized the whistle cord, and blew a long shrill blast. The men in the boat—they could be plainly seen through the glasses—started apart, and looked nervously behind at their pursuers. Then they grasped their paddles anew evidently interpreting the signal as an admonition to hurry up.

Our adventurers kept the *oomien* in sight for a couple of hours during which time its occupants worked with praiseworthy diligence; then with a parting screech of the siren they bade them adieu,

and turned back. As they slowly made their way up the river again Pete was thoughtful, and he finally said:

"Do you know I believe it will be better if we do not take the *Gracie* into the harbor by the bar! We want by all means to avoid attracting attention to it, and what has already occurred shows we are liable to be discovered at any moment if we come to an anchor right in front of the place where the gold is. Suppose the Scotchman had not answered our signal yesterday? If we had not heard him, and hadn't known he was coming we should have stopped, and not only Sinclair, but after him those two rascals, might have actually caught us on the placer mine."

"By the Sacred Crocodile of the Nile!" exclaimed Kennedy. "You are dead right, Pete. But somehow it appears to me as if we'd never get to that gold! However, we'd certainly better bring to at least a mile away from the Dessert Spoon Bar, and maybe it would be safer to be on the opposite side of the river. I don't want to take any chances."

"Cap'n Pete is sure sensible," agreed the rancher. "It would never do for the *Gracie* to lay there fur anybody ter see. There's no knowing when some more of them wild white men might heave in sight, an' ef thar's as much gold thar as Blondin allowed it would set them crazy, and we'd have to fight to hold our own. But I reckon we kin lay right in

that little cove where we stayed last night. It's out of the way, an' easy ter git ter the bar from thar."

This was the plan they finally agreed on. They gazed longingly at the slendor sand-spit and back to the snow-covered summit of *Ill-rit*, or Twin-Peak mountain, as they fought their way once more against the current to the cove.

CHAPTER XXIV

THREE HUNDRED DOLLARS A PAN—THE TYEE AND DEER MEET IN SITKA

THE three principals gathered in the bow of the *Gracie* for a final word before going to the mine. Kennedy was slightly pale, and they stared at each other with a new seriousness of manner.

Pete broke the silence. In spite of his youth he was the leading spirit of the three.

"What next?" he quietly asked.

The tension of the day had been too much for Captain Kennedy. His eyes gloated over the prospect in front, and his frame was rigid with anticipation. When he spoke there was a quaver in his voice:

"Let's—dig the gold!"

Pete glanced keenly at the excited man, and Floyd quietly put his hand on the other's shoulder as he said:

"Take it easy, old man! You're all het up with this thing, and have got a genuine case of gold fever. We're first on the ground. Take it easy."

"I think Joe's right!" remarked Pete. "Now we're on the spot, and it seems to be just as the

Frenchman left it, there's no reason for hurry or confusion."

The rancher nodded, and said:

"Them's my sentiments."

"By the Dove that left the Ark!" exclaimed Kennedy. "You two fellows are good philosophers. I suppose it's all right as you say, but somehow I can't hold myself in to-night."

"Of course," began Pete, "the first thing to do is to find out if gold is here, and how easy it will be to get it. If the fact is established, we may as well go about it in a business-like way."

"You are talking hard sense, boss," said Joe Floyd. "If we pan out gold here in big quantities, we've got to go about it in the right way."

"Yes, of course," agreed Kennedy. "But can't we do something right away?"

"Certainly we can," replied Pete. "Here's Jimmy to tell us that dinner is ready. We'll eat that 'right away,' and then we'll go ashore with the tools, and our gold miner here"—looking at Floyd—"will do some prospecting."

"All right," consented the revenue man. "But I confess I ain't as sharp-set as usual."

An hour later they left the *Gracie* for the placer. The miner had evidently sized up the situation. With a pick and shovel over his shoulder, and a gold pan hanging at his belt he led the way up the ravine as decidedly as if he knew just where to make the first strike. There was a little bend in the

stream a few hundred yards from the river where the brawling current foamed over a bed of gravel. The ravine, or rather valley, through which the creek ran down was a quarter of a mile wide. Floyd paused as his glance took in his surroundings:

"Here's where this creek used to run a hundred years ago or so," he said. "And I reckon if there's any gold come down from the matrix up above, it's likely had some trouble to get by this point. Jest you fellows wait a moment."

He dropped his indifference, and fell to shovelling into the bank like a madman. He threw away the loose gravel and sand to a depth of three or four feet with the intensity of a buzz-saw. Then his energetic shovel suddenly became a carefully-controlled tool as he probed, and scraped with anxious deftness.

"By the Great Horn Spoon!" he exclaimed after a moment. "I've reached the pay-streak. There ain't no gold ever got below this lining of clay."

He had cleared out a square pit into which the others gazed intently. It would not have surprised them if they had seen the glint of gold at the bottom. Joe took out shovelful after shovelful of the clay, and carefully put it in a neat heap behind him. It was in a stratum about four inches thick, and he removed with it a light crust of the top soil. In a moment he had all of the layer he had uncovered. There was possibly a bushel of the clay. He leaned on the handle of the shovel, and looked at the

others. They noted a blotch of dull red on his cheek bone:

"This will tell the tale!" He whispered.

He filled the gold pan with the clay, and Pete and Kennedy followed him to the nearest pool. He knelt before it, and submerged the pan. Then he lifted it dripping full, and began to puddle the clay, holding it in his left and working with the fingers of his right hand. Occasionally he gave it a dexterous flirt with his wrist to cast away the overflow and then refilled it. In this way the contents of the pan were soon reduced to half the original amount. They watched him with bated breath, and Pete saw Kennedy's knuckles grow white as he clenched his fists convulsively.

Suddenly Floyd, put the pan on the sand, and leaped to his feet with something in his hand. He rinsed it through the water with a fierce gesture, and held it before the others' eyes.

It was an irregular lump of shining yellow gold, as large as a walnut!

"Hooroar!" he shouted.

"Hurrah!" echoed Pete.

"Hoo—" cried Kennedy, as he fell senseless on his face.

The long strain, and the sudden fulfillment of his most brilliant expectations had been too much for the revenue man. Pete dashed a cupful of water sharply in his face, and he came to his senses with comical suddenness. He sat up, and questioned



IT WAS AN IRREGULAR LUMP OF SHINING YELLOW GOLD

them with his eyes. Floyd passed him the nugget, and said solemnly:

“Sure’s you’re born! We’re all rich men! That nugget—” he took it again, and hefted it with practised hand—“is worthy fifty dollars this minute, and such lumps don’t grow alone. There’s more where that comes from.”

The rancher had regained his balance. He handed the precious lump carelessly to Captain Pete, and turned back to his gold pan. The lad assisted his friend to his feet, and they came over to see him work. The smooth facility with which the old miner performed his task delighted them. Dip!—he filled the pan. A dexterous motion of his trained wrist sent the water circling around the clay in the bottom. Swish! he flirited off the superfluous muddy fluid. A few moments of this expert process, and he became careful as the water grew clearer in the receptacle. He poured it off with cautious painstaking, drop by drop, and arose.

Their heads touched as they peered into the pan. “Hoorah again!”

On the circle of the inner edge were scattered half a dozen nuggets the size of a hazel nut, and a string of scale-gold.

“Jumping Jehosophat! Did anyone ever see the like! It’ll run three hundred dollars to the pan! If this ain’t a pocket it’s the biggest gold strike the world ever saw. In a week a man could fill a five-gallon kerosene tin on this pay-streak.”

Floyd washed out all the clay he had dug. When they returned to the *Gracie*, there was a handful—worth more than a thousand dollars—of the virgin metal in the buckskin “poke” he had produced from one of his pockets to hold the treasure.

Up to this time the hired members of the expedition had known nothing of the purpose of their leaders. The dazzling success of the treasure hunt now made it necessary to arrange matters on a new basis.

“Floyd,” said Pete, thoughtfully. “I suppose you understand all about mining law, and the making of locations?”

The rancher nodded silently.

“Then we’d better get at this thing systematically,” continued Pete. “Suppose we each take up a claim individually, and work all three together for the benefit of the ‘Yellowbird Gold Mining Company.’”

“What about Tom Long and Jimmy?” inquired Kennedy.

“And Ah Fat and Ib-won?” added the rancher.

“Yes, they all have rights to be considered,” conceded Pete.

“There’s enough for all of us twice over,” affirmed Joe Floyd.

“Anyhow,” ruminated Kennedy, “they’re all salary men, and hired by us—except the coolie.”

“We’d better mark out our own claims before we tell it them,” advised Floyd. “I reckon we’ve got

about the pick of the gulch here. Then they can take up their claims wherever they want."

"Yes, that's fair," agreed the others.

Before they slept they marked out the claims that were to be worked in the interest of the "Yellowbird Gold Mining Company." Then they called Long and Jimmy, and the aliens to a council of the whole. Pete made a speech in which he explained the discovery of the placer ground, and how he and Kennedy had come to have knowledge of its existence. He informed them they were at liberty to take up claims for themselves and work them on their own account. It was apparent Long and the Scotchman were not so excited over the matter as their masters had been. Ah Fat kept his sentiments to himself, but looked exceedingly intelligent. Ib-won laughed, and said:

"No want ig-o-ret! Bad man kill when got."

After a moment's consultation with Long, Jimmy the little Scotchman made his employers a proposition.

"We feel, sirs, that this gold lay-out is mair yours than oors. Ye fand it, and we hae nae richt tae it. Long and me think ye micht put us twain on a percentage, and let it go at that."

"The very thing!" agreed Pete. "Floyd, locate a claim for Long and one for Jimmy. We'll turn them in with ours to the 'Yellowbird Gold Mining Company.' Kennedy and I as original discoverers and the investors of the capital, will each draw

down forty per cent. of the profits. You Joe, as mining superintendent will get ten per cent., and a salary, and Jimmy and Long five a piece."

"It will make us all rich, and you and Kennedy millionaires," announced Floyd.

When the *Tyee* arrived in Sitka, the roses had again begun to bloom in Grace Hogan's cheeks. The sea air, the beautiful scenery, and the kindness and consideration of all on board, from the grizzled captain to rollicking young Murph, the deck hand, made her feel again that life was worth living. Besides she was on her way to meet Pete, and that alone was enough to make her heart sing. She was preparing for a visit ashore, when Tom Fisher called out to her from the deck.

"Come up here, Gracie, there is a beautiful little steamer coming in the harbor, and Captain Graignic says it is the revenue cutter *Deer*, that Pete wrote you he met in Unalaska."

She trilled happily in her girlish treble as she answered, and came up the companionway with a brisk rush which denoted her renewed health and spirits.

The stranger came to the dock, and in a moment Captain Senkil stepped ashore. The fisherman had read Pete's letter mentioning the meeting of the *Deer* so he had no hesitation in accosting the captain. The latter as we know was not a stickler for etiquette. He met the skipper of the *Tyee* cordi-

ally, and as soon as he understood he was Captain Pete's father and that the *Tyee* had Grace Hogan, his old friend's daughter, and Pete's *fiancé* on board, he was all affability. His official station, however, had made him a politic man. He recalled how he had to corkscrew the *Gracie's* secret out of Captain Pete, and wondered how much this party knew of his true mission up the Yukon River. When he heard of the unexpected fortune to which the lad had fallen heir, and the importance of his immediate return to Cortesana he was disposed to give all the aid he could.

"Where was Captain Pete bound?" he asked as if casually, but with a sharp, inquiring glance at the father's face.

The Frenchman was alert, and caught the look. It puzzled him, for he had no key to Senkil's knowledge. The naval officer was thinking that perhaps it was best to tell this shrewd and resolute-looking old man the whole situation between Captain Pete and Lee Sing, and to let him be the judge of its importance. On his part the fisherman was wondering whether circumstances could have arisen which had induced his son to confide to Senkil that he was gold hunting on the Yukon. He answered:

"I know where Pete was going, Captain Senkil, and what his errand was, but I am not at liberty to tell."

This answer determined Captain Senkil's course:

"I must have a private talk with you, Captain

Graignic," he said. "And it had better come off before I meet Miss Hogan. It may not be advisable to tell her all you and I know."

"She knows he is on ze Yukon," answered the fisherman.

"Come to my cabin with me, Captain Graignic," said the naval officer.

The fisherman was aware Chinamen were suspected of causing Blondin's death, and even that circumstances had led Kennedy to believe Lee Sing was responsible for, if not actually culpable in the assassination. The news that the Victoria tea merchant had formerly been a pirate in the Southern hemisphere, and taken up his trade again in the northern seas, fairly took him aback. When he heard of the arrest of the *Dragon's Fang*-ers by Senkil, and their subsequent escape from the calaboose in Unalaska, his face became grave and anxious. As Senkil proceeded with his tale, and related how the day after the *Gracie* had disappeared in the ice pack, the *Dragon's Fang* had followed among the floes, he fell silent and thoughtful.

"What do you zink about it?" he asked the officer. "You are acquainted wiz conditions in zese seas. Is it probable the boats have met?"

"Perhaps not probable," returned Senkil slowly. "But perfectly possible. Both were helpless in the ice pack, of course. But if they got out of it about the same time they would head for the same point, the delta of the Yukon River."

"I am afraid zere has been trouble," said the Frenchman. "Pete and Kennedy will no doubt take care of zemselves, and zey have Joe Floyd wiz zem, but Chinamen are an unknown quantity. It worries me."

CHAPTER XXV

THE GOLD HUNTERS RETURN—TWO BEASTS OF PREY

“**I**F I didn’t have a lady passenger, I’d go pirate-hunting!”

Captain Graignic made this remark in a resigned yet wistful way that caused the naval officer to smile in sympathy.

“It is a pity,” he conceded.

“In any case I zink I had better get to ze scene of operations as soon as possible.”

“Perhaps you’d better,” Captain Senkil agreed.

Gracie’s plans for exploring the objects of interest around picturesque Sitka were nipped in the bud. The fisherman announced that, learning from the commander of the revenue cutter that the Bering Sea was probably clear of ice, he would not lose a moment in the pursuit of his son.

Grace and Tom both observed how the fisherman hurried them off, and although his conduct had not been hitherto marked by lack of energy, there seemed an added strenuousness in the vigor with which he pressed forward. Neither suspected—and Captain Graignic did not tell them—the possible complications added to his task by the informa-

tion received from Senkil. He had plenty of coal to carry him to Unalaska, and calculated on taking as much aboard there as the ample bunkers of the *Tyee* would hold.

The reader will please imagine the details of the voyage of the *Tyee* from Sitka through Unimak Straits, after stopping to coal, to the mouth of the Yukon River. They encountered no ice, had no accidents, and late in July Captain Graignic picked up an Esquimau pilot, and entered the northern mouth of the river. As they came through the delta he gave one command to Tom Fisher which puzzled the latter, although he had learned to obey the ex-fisherman's orders without asking questions.

"Tom," said the Captain, "keep a sharp lookout wiz your glasses as we go along. Let me know if you see a sealing schooner or any Chinamen.

Under Mining Superintendent Joe Floyd's directions, the operations of the "Yellowbird Gold Mining Company" were prosecuted vigorously. They had brought along rough lumber from Cortesana in the hold of the *Gracie*. Floyd set the idlers to uncovering the pay-streak on the lines he indicated, while he himself constructed and erected sluice boxes at a place where he contrived to utilize a waterfall with which to wash out his gold instead of working by the tedious pan process.

The riches of the placer ground astounded even Floyd. It set the rest crazy with the mad en-

thusiasm that seems to accompany the discovery of Nature's golden hoards.

Every night found them thousands of dollars richer than they had been in the morning. The four inch stratum of clay on the little point Joe had selected for his first prospect, turned out over a hundred thousand dollars in bullion. As they continued their operations further up the creek, their efforts continued to be successful, although the metal was not so plentiful as at first, and ran chiefly in scale gold and dust instead of nuggets.

At the end of ten days from the evening they had anchored alongside of Dessert Spoon Bar, the three adventurers sat in the cabin before Pete's open chest. It was half full of virgin gold!

"What do you suppose all that's worth?" asked Kennedy with awe.

Pete shook his head as an indication of ignorance.

"I reckon I kin give a guess that will come within twenty or thirty thousand dollars," said the Mining Superintendent.

Pete laughed, and the ex-revenue officer gasped:

"That's close enough."

"This here gold," said Floyd, "is worth say two hundred dollars a pound. I've kept a pretty close run of the heft of it as we brought it in day by day. There's nigh onto a ton and half in that chist. How much would that make?" he inquired of Pete.

"Six hundred thousand dollars," he replied.

"By the Tail of the Extinct Mastodon!"

It was the biggest oath Kennedy could think of, and seemed to fit the occasion.

"That means," said Pete, figuring a moment on a piece of paper. "Two hundred and forty thousand dollars for you, Kennedy."

"By—" Kennedy weakly trailed off into silence as Pete continued:

—"the same for me. Sixty thousand for you, Joe—"

"That's good!" the Superintendent grinned.

—"thirty thousand for Tom Long and thirty for Jimmy. It's a pretty satisfactory ten days' work," he concluded.

"You're mighty right," agreed Kennedy. "This is a good way of making money. I haven't cut any man's wage down to pile up that two hundred and forty thousand, nor played anybody a sharp trick, or taken the bread out of the mouths of widows or orphans."

"I hadn't looked at it in that way," said Pete. "But by Jove, you're right! Mining is square business the way we've done it."

"You'll find every old miner holds them sentiments," the Mining Superintendent said earnestly. "That's one of the reasons we all like the game."

"Well," broke in Kennedy. "I reckon I've got enough money with this here to last me the rest of my life. I don't see how I can spend more than two thousand dollars a year, so that pile would stretch

over a hundred and twenty years. I believe I'll quit."

This was said with perfect earnestness. Pete smiled amusedly, although the simplicity of the speech made him love and admire his friend more than ever.

"I'm afraid that'll hardly do, Cap," he answered. "When a man gets as rich as you are he's got to keep on getting richer. The 'Yellowbird Gold Mining Company' owns these five claims, and we've either got to go on working them as long as there is any gold, or sell them to somebody else for cash."

"How much do you suppose they'd bring?" asked Kennedy resignedly, with an evident intention of getting rid of his share to the first comer.

"Ten to twenty million," smiled Pete.

Kennedy's arms went above his head.

"Suffering Moses!" he cried. "We'll have to put them up to Rockefeller."

"I suppose," said Pete, a few moments later, "that we ought as sound business men, to get these claims on file. Where must we go, Joe?"

"Sitka, or Juneau would be nearest, I reckon."

"Let's do it!" unexpectedly suggested Kennedy. "And then go on 'out.' I want to get action on some of my money."

The idea struck Pete with favor. He foresaw possible trouble ahead if their claims were not promptly legalized, and it was apparent that the future management of the mine could be conducted

so it would not be necessary for him to oversee, or take part in the process. Then to tell the truth, something seemed to be drawing him toward Puget Sound. If he had known his father and Tom Fisher, and above all Grace were on the new *Tyee* in the Bering Sea at that very moment, a pair of mules could not have held him back from starting down the river.

Floyd took a different view of things. This was natural and perhaps produced by the ratio between sixty, and two hundred and forty thousand dollars. He was not ready to stop making money when the opportunities were so favorable. His inclination however, chimed in well with Pete's plans. It was finally arranged that Floyd should remain at the mine on a salary, and work it so far as he was able with the assistance of Ib-won. Ah Fat had taken a claim further up the creek than the property possessed by our adventurers, and was mining on his own account. He was succeeding very well although his ground was not as rich as the first discovery. He expected to take out all he wanted during the season, and go back that winter, and spend the balance of his life in China.

Two days after the *Gracie* started down the river *en route* for Sitka.

The little harbor in which the *Gracie* had taken refuge the night Lee Sing's party had been so signally defeated through the vigilance of the mastiff

was known to the natives who occasionally earned an honest dollar by piloting river steamers through the first stages of their journey. The man whom the fisherman had engaged found himself confronted by an obstinate head wind in the vicinity, and naturally made for the place. The *Tyee* was luckier—or perhaps the gale was less strong—and she had no difficulty in coming to an anchor in almost the identical berth where her predecessor had lain a month before. There was no other course open than to remain quietly until the head wind abated, or hauled around so they could continue their journey. Mr. Graignic could see no alternative, and advised the engineer, Hanlon, and deck hands Tom Fisher and Murph, to turn in and get all the sleep they could:

“For,” he said, “I’m going to run zis packet night and day as soon as I get out of zese contrary winds until I meet up wiz Captain Pete!”

They took him at his word, which they had found was a sensible thing to do, and retired to their berths. Gracie soon followed, and the old man was left alone on deck. Although ten o’clock in the evening it was broad daylight, and the sun was shining. He stood by the rail looking idly into the water. The turbidness of the spring freshets had passed, and the haven was limpid as a mountain spring. Pete’s father had not allowed his state of mind to become apparent to the rest, but he was much worried over the possibilities of what might

have happened in case Lee Sing had overtaken the *Gracie*.

"If Pete had only known the pirates were on his track!" he muttered.

At this moment his wandering eye caught the glint of some white object on the yellow sand that lay at the bottom of the water. He idly traced its outlines, and then with quick interest, concentrated his keen vision upon the object. Yes, there were the legs and arms—and the skull! It was a human skeleton, without the shadow of a doubt.

Like a flash the fisherman connected this new discovery with the subject of his previous meditations. Had it anything to do with Pete? The Frenchman had imagination—it was one of the qualities he had transmitted to his son—and in a moment his fancy built up a possible attack on the *Gracie* at this very spot by the Chinese pirates. Why not? His son's steamer might as readily been driven into this haven by the force of the elements as the *Tyee*. Unaware that the pirates were on his trail, his ship's company would have sought repose—as his own had done. And the oriental miscreants had stolen on them, and put them to death, afterwards using the little steamer they had captured in which to hunt the source of Blondin's treasure.

This vision rose plainly before Mr. Graignic's eyes as if painted on the surface of the water above that gruesome skeleton. Then his hard common sense asserted itself. He told himself he was

dreaming, and that there was not a chance in ten million that the bones beneath the water had anything to do with Captain Pete, or the crew of the *Gracie*. Nevertheless he determined he would watch while the others were sleeping.

The harbor in which the fisherman was doing sentry duty on the *Tyee* was on the south side of the rocky headland with a sand-bar extending from its point toward the delta. On the north side two great slabs of basaltic rock had fallen together so their points touched, forming a gloomy cavern which might on occasion, serve to shelter a wild beast from the fury of a driving storm. In the narrow opening between the leaning columns a few half burnt brands of drift wood smouldered, and the vacant space behind sheltered the recumbent form of Wong. He was just awaking from his slumber, and as he raised himself on his arm, hasty footsteps made him hasten his movements. The new comer was Captain Lee Sing. As he reached the entrance he dashed the burning chunks apart with his foot, and carefully beat out the blaze.

Wong gazed at him in stolid silence, and waited for him to give his reasons for the action. The two men were altered for the worse since we saw them last. Only the remnants of their tattered garments clung to their half-naked bodies, and their faces were swollen, and disfigured by the merciless attacks of the gnats and mosquitoes. Under the cir-

cumstances in which they maintained existence they had returned to a state of nature. They had been compelled by the exigencies of their fate to live like the denizens of the forest, and become beasts of prey. Their cavern was a fitting habitation for them. But they had retained some of the attributes of humanity, and were more dangerous to their kind than their brethren of the woodland.

"Our chance has come at last," said Lee Sing to his mate—of course in the Chinese tongue of which I cannot attempt to reproduce the idiom. "A steamer lies at anchor on the other side of the point. I watched her come in. The crew have gone below, and there is but one man, half asleep, on the deck. We will kill them all, and take the boat."

It showed the mettle of the men, and the straits to which they were reduced when the other welcomed the news—and the plan—with alacrity. There was no question of soliciting aid in their dire extremity. It was at once the ruthless law of the wild beast and the pirate.

Kill, and take red-handed!

"Wait," growled Wong as his Captain turned to lead the way. He crawled into the cavern, and promptly backed out again, holding something in his hand which resembled an oblong strip of stout leather with a piece of marline tied to each extremity.

"Oh, your sling. Right! We may need it!" said the chief.

Wong went to the water's edge and selected with care half a dozen rounded pebbles the size of an egg.

"Good for the man on deck, perhaps," he said in his hoarse voice as he stowed the deadly missiles about his person.

CHAPTER XXVI

AND THE LAST—WONG'S END AND THE LOVERS' MEETING

GRACE could not sleep. This eternal day prevailing through the twenty-four hours, although novel and diverting as a travel experience, interfered with the habits she had acquired at home where Day and Night were more evenly, and sensibly divided. She drew the shade across the port-hole of her cabin, and again composed herself to slumber. That "*nasty*" midnight sun seemed to concentrate its rays on her curtain, and shine right through. Then her foot suddenly itched consumedly, and she had not finished scratching when the irritation attacked her right arm. She viciously dug at it with the fingers of her left hand. Then the roots of her hair began to twitch, and she suddenly sat up in her bunk.

The truth was the arrival of the *Tyee* on the Yukon had stimulated her imagination, and set her mind working until sleep was as impossible to her as it was to Mr. Graignic on the deck above. Her thoughts wandered to Captain Pete, and she speculated as to his whereabouts and circumstances. How far was he ahead of them up the river? Had

he found the gold of which he was in search? If he had, and lots of it, it would be rather nice—though, she reflected, she would love dear old Pete just as much if he had remained a fisherman and rancher all his life on Waldron Island. As a matter of fact it would be rather nice to be the wife of a handsome young fisherman, and live with him on an island away from everybody, with no social duties, and—

She shrugged her shoulders resignedly, and arose:

“I guess *you* can’t sleep,” she said, making a charming, whimsical face at herself as she glanced into the little mirror above the washstand. “You had better take a walk along the beach!”

She bathed her hot face, dressed, and went on deck.

“What’s ze matter, Gracie? Can’t you sleep?” inquired the fisherman.

“I don’t believe I was ever so wide-awake in my life!” she answered with small, feminine irritation.

“Neizer was I!” acknowledged he. “Zere must be something disturbing in ze atmosphere”—A stentorian snore came through the window of the deck cabin which the crew occupied in common—“zough it only seems to affect you and me.”

“Let’s take a walk along the shore,” she suggested.

Some indefinable impulse made the fisherman inclined to object to the proposition, but he looked at

the strip of yellow shingle leading to the point of the bare headland, and across to the silent line of forest a couple of hundreds of feet distant on the river bank, and it seemed silly to him to combat the girl's evident desire:

"Come along," he said, as he pulled the boat up to the side.

The *Gracie* was booming down the great river. Now that Pete was started, he could not hurry forward rapidly enough—to Grace, his heart kept saying. Considering the only knowledge he had of the perils of the Yukon were what he had gained in the trip up under the pilotage of Ib-won, he certainly made a remarkable passage. He remained on deck most of the time, and when he came to a place where he feared difficulty, he often took the wheel himself, and steered her through the rocks and currents.

Six days of this strenuous work brought the steamer nearly to the opening of the delta. They passed the Indian village where they had made their first stop after leaving Dead Man's Bay, as he and Kennedy had come to call the scene of Wong's capture. At the heel of the day they sighted the rocky headland that has so often been mentioned in these pages. It was a broad, clear stretch of river, and Pete on a momentary impulse motioned Long Tom to give the craft a sheer toward the point. He wanted to view again the little haven where instead

of the sought-for safety, they had encountered the attack of the pirate crew. Without knowing why he did so Pete suddenly shut off the steam, and the *Gracie* silently glided down the stream fifty yards from the shore.

Kennedy had taken his rifle and cartridge belt from the rack, and was swearing at his cleaning rod as he swabbed his gun because the ring at the end was gone, and he had nothing to hold onto as he alternately viciously shoved it down the barrel, and pulled it back again. He sauntered toward the bow, taking them with him, to speak to Pete. Dope raised his ponderous form from where he had been lying, and followed yawning. When he reached his master who was standing at the rail, he stood on his hind feet, and planted his paws on the bulwark as he had done that night when he looked down into the dory.

The *Gracie* was now sliding rapidly past the headland, and was opening the sand-bar, although it was not yet fully uncovered to the sight of the two men on the bow of the steamer. The mastiff hardly raised his head above the level of the rail when his black upper lip drew back to his nostrils showing a line of white teeth, and he uttered a threatening growl. The same second two men emerged from a copse of alder that grew on the spot where the rocky headland joined the sand-spit. Their backs were to the steamer, and our friends did not recognize the uncouth, tattered savages as their old ac-

quaintances Lee Sing and Wong. Dope's nose was more reliable. He *smelt* his enemies, but true to his training only showed the knowledge by the vicious snarl that his master interpreted rightly to mean imminent danger from the strangers.

In the second which it took this to happen the *Gracie* was gliding down the river with the tide, and every heart-beat opened up more of the sand-spit to the gaze. Twenty feet further, and Pete, to his inexpressible amazement saw his father and the form of Grace Hogan glide into view like a picture on the shifting slide of a dark lantern. He stood transfixed with surprise, unable to utter a sound or move a limb. Wong, unknowing of the observers at his back, chose this moment to carry out the plan he and his ingenious chief had evolved. The fisherman and Grace sauntered along a hundred feet away, engrossed in their subject—they were discussing Pete—with their eyes on the sand at their feet.

The pirate moved forward a pace, put one of the stones in the bed of the sling, and started to twirl it around his head preparatory to sending it on its mission. Kennedy, the Stevens "broken" in his hands, and the metal cleaning rod projecting from the muzzle, stared at the tableau. Pete's eyes caught Wong's action as he raised his hand:

"Murder!" he shouted, taking the deadly intention of the gesture at a glance. "The SLING!"

A bolt of lightning could not have been more

prompt and effective than the ex-revenue officer's action. He seemed to spring the barrel on to the stock and flash a cartridge into the chamber with one smooth movement, and as Wong gave a startled side glance at Pete's shout, he levelled the rifle and pulled the trigger.

They heard a metallic ring in the bellow of the discharge. Wong gave a slight start, and fell forward on his face. Just beyond his body the steel rod, point down, quivered in the sand. At the report of the gun Lee Sing drew back in the alder tangle, and could not be found subsequently.

The effect of the rifle shot was almost as marked on Grace and the fisherman as it was on the Chinamen, although in a less deadly way. When the girl raised her eyes she saw her lover standing on the bow of the approaching steamer with his arms outstretched to her. He seemed about to take a header into the intervening water to swim to her. Mr. Graignic saw the stricken pirate as he tumbled in a heap, and ran quickly to him before Grace could tear her eyes from the face of her lover.

Kennedy again displayed his practical mind, and quick-thoughtedness in emergency. He said a word to Tom Long, and together they got the kedge over the bow. It struck good holding ground in the mud, and the *Gracie* described a half circle, and brought up with her head to the rush of the current. In a second the skiff was lowered, and Kennedy pulled ashore, while Pete danced up and down

in the bow, and acted like a maniac trying to upset the boat. But the next moment Grace was in his arms.

The revenue man considerably left them to their transports, and joined Mr. Graignic, who was examining the body of the dead pirate with a puzzled face. In his absorption he only said shortly:

“Zis is extraordinary! Ze man is dead. But zere is no blood, and I cannot find ze wound. It is a miracle!”

At this moment his eye caught the slender, quivering steel cleaning rod which stuck in the sand hard by.

“What is zat?” he demanded.

Kennedy laughed, and then his face grew grim as he disengaged the sling still containing the smooth pebble the size of an egg from the clutch of the stiffening hand:

“See!” he explained. “He was going to slug you or Miss Hogan with that. I had to shoot quick, and did not have time to take the cleaning rod out of the barrel.” He lifted the remnant of cotton blouse, and exposed the man’s side. A faint blue spot like a powder mark was apparent on the yellow skin, alongside the arm pit. He turned the body with his foot as he would have the carcass of a dog, and pointed to a similar blemish just above the right hip.

“It must have bored his heart, and skewered him through the body like one of those duelling swords

you Frenchmen used to fight with in the old times."

"Sapristi!" said Mr. Graignic, using a long forgotten oath. "But where did ze bullet go?"

It was Kennedy's turn to look mystified:

"By the sea serpent's tail!" he exclaimed. "I must have used a blank cartridge! I had some for signalling."

When Kennedy had thus made the occurrence clear they shook hands with earnestness as if they had just met.

And I think we will say goodbye to them for the present. At any rate Grace and Pete were reunited, and there was a fortune in gold dust and nuggets in the chest in the cabin of the *Gracie*. I don't mind telling you that Pete had a number of surprising adventures before he succeeded in bringing that bullion down to the Sound, and putting it in the bank, but, after all, that is another story, and should not be told at the tail-end of Captain Pete in Alaska.

THE END

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